

**“Learning as we go”: street-level bureaucrats and policy learning during the
Syrian refugee resettlement process in Saskatoon**

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Abstract

In late 2015 and early 2016, the Canadian government resettled 25,000 Syrian refugees within roughly a three-month period. This initiative brought a much higher number of refugees to Canada than are usually accepted in that timeframe, and put pressure on the resettlement system. This thesis focuses on the organizations that do the work of resettling refugees at the community level, and how their employees — otherwise known as street-level bureaucrats — dealt with the pressure created by this situation. The findings indicate that the Syrian initiative exposed weaknesses in the existing system and created new obstacles with which street-level bureaucrats had to contend. Presented with an overwhelming strain on their system, street-level bureaucrats at Saskatoon SPOs performed a real-time evaluation of the system in which they work, and devised solutions to issues as they arose. The challenges that emerged in Saskatoon during this process had three main sources: the over-arching pressure brought on by the scale of the initiative; the resources available to complete the task; and co-ordination issues that emerged under the circumstances.

Using a theoretical framework first presented by Hugh Heclo, this thesis argues that situations of great pressure can force street-level bureaucrats through a process of evaluation and problem-solving that results in incremental policy learning at the ground level. During early stages of the Syrian refugee resettlement initiative, workers who provide initial services to refugees used community connections, sector partners, and innovation to deal with the time and resource constraints of the process. The result of this undertaking was a process of policy learning that ultimately resulted in a stronger system than had existed prior to the initiative. This strengthening process was made possible in two ways: by the community response to the need for resources and assistance, and the solutions devised by sector actors. The lessons learned through this process should be incorporated into ongoing practice to continue to make the system more effective.

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Introduction

Between 2011 and 2016, over 4.8 million Syrians fled civil conflict in their country (UNHCR, 2016). The number of displaced strained the resources of neighbouring countries and those further afield. Due to these increasing numbers, limited resources, and lack of rights in bordering countries, over one million asylum seekers crossed the Mediterranean Sea in 2015 in an attempt to reach Europe: over 3,500 died or went missing (UNHCR, 2015). In 2016 sea arrivals numbered 355,728 (UNHCR, 2016a). The majority of asylum seekers crossing into Europe were Syrian (UNHCR, 2016a).

This crisis became highly salient in Canada in September 2015, when a photo emerged of a three-year-old Syrian boy who died while attempting to make this journey. Alan Kurdi, his mother, and his brother drowned attempting to cross the Mediterranean, and his body washed ashore in Turkey (MacKinnon, 2015). It was reported that the family had planned to apply for refugee status in Canada. The incident coincided with the Canadian federal election campaign, and led each of the major parties to add a Syrian refugee response plan to their platform. The proposals of the Liberal and Conservative parties, however, were drastically different: the Conservatives pledged to admit 10,000 Syrian refugees over four years, while the Liberal Party, who won a majority on October 15, 2015, promised to bring 25,000 Syrians to Canada by the end of the year (“The refugee crisis”, 2015).

The first chartered flight of Syrian refugees arrived in Toronto on December 10, 2015, as the newly-elected government put their campaign promise into action. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau greeted them at the airport, gave them winter jackets, and said “Welcome home” (Joseph, 2015). This public, welcoming approach sharply contrasted the actions of the previous government who, earlier in 2015, had secretly halted the processing of Syrian refugees for two

months (Friesen, 2015). When this was processing halt was exposed by the media months later, the Conservatives claimed they were concerned about potential security threats posed by refugees (Friesen, 2015). In its campaign platform, the Conservative Party focused on a number of issues that portrayed Muslims negatively, adding to the heightened public concern about refugees from a largely-Islamic region.

It was within a rhetorical landscape of an immediate shift in messaging about Muslim refugees, from the Conservative to the Liberal approach, that Canada undertook the process of resettling 25,000 Syrians with a few short months. The initial months of this process essentially doubled the average of 26,000 refugees Canada has accepted annually over the previous decade (CIC, 2015). By the end of 2016 Canada had resettled over 40,000 Syrian refugees in total (IRCC, 2017)

The dynamics of the Syrian refugee crisis are complex and have a global reach. Canada is among few Western states that have shown an open willingness to resettle refugees. Its uniqueness from other refugee-accepting countries like Germany and Sweden, however, lies in its physical distance from the crisis itself. Canada's geographic location, far from source countries and the route of those seeking asylum, affords it the ability to set quotas and fulfill them in a relatively systematic fashion. Its European counterparts, due to overland and sea routes to Europe from conflict zones, and open border policies in the Schengen region, cannot structure a similar refugee-acceptance framework. Canada can choose refugees who have been vetted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), who pass its own security checks, and filter them to communities of its choosing, based (as much as possible) on the capacity of the receiving communities. This also is not a system that is available to countries bordering conflict zones like Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon, who now host the highest numbers of

refugees per capita in the world (3RP, 2015), and is more difficult for European Union countries with only a porous external border. While these regions have struggled and mostly failed to regulate the number of asylum seekers crossing their borders, Canada can follow a safe and orderly process of resettlement.

Despite this advantageous position, Canada has faced challenges in implementing a large-scale resettlement initiative within a truncated timeframe. The initial logistics of accepting, screening, and flying refugees to Canada was a large undertaking that was achieved by the new government within three months. Once the refugees arrived in their new Canadian communities, the long and complex process of resettlement and integration began.

In the midst of this highly dynamic situation are the non-profit organizations tasked with providing resettlement and integration services to newly-arrived Government Assisted Refugees (GARs). Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) funds these Service Provider Organizations (SPOs) to provide services on its behalf, which include language training, skills development, orientation, and assistance with basic needs like housing (Government of Canada, 2015).

Focusing on Saskatoon, a city of a quarter million inhabitants located in the Western province of Saskatchewan, this thesis examines how the Syrian refugee initiative played out at the ground level, by conducting a case study of the settlement sector during the initial stages of this process. It outlines the policy environment in which the initiative took place, including the evolution of immigration and refugee policy in Canada, the structure of the resettlement services system, and the challenges and outcomes of the Syrian initiative itself. This case study uses insights provided by Saskatoon-based SPO employees who delivered programs and services to

Syrian refugees during the initial intake and resettlement process to assess how the system fared under the unique pressure.

Saskatchewan received 1,188 Syrian refugees between November 2015 and July 31, 2016, 1,066 of whom were GARs (IRCC, 2016a): Saskatoon received 400 GARs during this time (GGP, 2016). On average, Saskatchewan receives around 600 refugees per year; Saskatoon, about 200 (CIC, 2015). The doubling of the number of refugees Saskatoon receives annually within a three-month timeframe put intense pressure on non-profit organizations that are, by definition, already under-resourced (Richmond & Shields, 2005; Lipsky, 1980).

Saskatoon has four SPOs that provide settlement and integration services to newcomers, including GARs. The Saskatoon Open Door Society (SODS), the largest of these organizations, is a central actor in the refugee settlement process in particular. SODS is refugees' first point of contact when they arrive, and the main coordinator of their initial settlement in the city.

Saskatoon's other SPOs, the Global Gathering Place (GGP), International Women of Saskatoon (IWS), and the Saskatchewan Intercultural Association (SIA), also provide a range of programs and services for newcomers to the city. Saskatchewan's settlement sector umbrella organization — the Saskatchewan Association of Immigrant Settlement and Integration Agencies (SAISIA) — is also located in Saskatoon, and plays an advocacy and engagement role for the sector. In Saskatoon as elsewhere, the employees who work to deliver services and programming at these organizations can be understood as “street-level bureaucrats”; workers who implement government policy at the ground level, and who have some discretion in what that policy ultimately looks like when it is carried out (Lipsky, 1980).

As they carry out their work, street-level bureaucrats shape policy that has been formulated by government departments that may not understand the unique circumstances faced

by those who implement it. This thesis argues that, when put in situations of extreme pressure street-level bureaucrats are, by nature of their positions, forced to undergo a process of real-time evaluation that results in policy learning. The Syrian refugee resettlement process created this type of environment, when street-level bureaucrats were given much more work than they would normally handle, and needed to figure out ways to complete the task. Using the literature related to street-level bureaucrats, policy evaluation, and policy learning, it will illustrate how a ground-level system, put in a pressure-cooker, can emerge stronger and more cohesive due to the process of evaluation, problem-solving, and learning that occurs.

Rationale

This thesis seeks to gain insights about the translation of federal government refugee policy into the lived experiences of the street-level bureaucrats tasked with implementing that policy in Saskatoon. The federal government is responsible for refugee resettlement and directly funds the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP), for which SODS and the GGP are responsible (Garcea, 2011). As Permanent Residents refugees are also eligible to access other programs provided by SODS and the other SPOs in the city. IWS, for example, oversees the Language Assessment and Referral Centre (LARC) which provides language assessment services to newcomers (including refugees); GGP oversees some aspects of refugee healthcare and helped to organize health clinics for Syrians in partnership with family physicians in the city (Observation, Refugee Coalition meeting, January 20, 2016). While these are all positive initiatives, shuffling clients between agencies takes collaboration and coordination that may be lacking under the current system.

Because of this system, Saskatoon provides an interesting context to study service delivery during the Syrian refugee initiative. In Regina, settlement and integration services are

overseen by one organization (Regina Open Door Society), while four separate organizations provide these services in Saskatoon. While the organizations all have a common goal and attempt to work together to reach it, the competitive, contract-based funding structure of settlement service provision can complicate collaboration efforts. For these reasons, conducting a case study of Saskatoon's resettlement system and its relationship with community and government partners during this process is ideal for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the resettlement services system as it currently exists.

Saskatoon is also a unique context for this study as a small city with historically low levels of immigration. Prior to 2005, immigrants made up only five per cent of the population of Saskatchewan (Garcea, 2011). Since then, however, the immigrant population has increased steadily, with Saskatoon attracting many of these newcomers (Garcea, 2013). Much of the research on newcomer settlement and integration is conducted in Canada's larger and more-diverse cities, like Toronto and Vancouver; Saskatoon provides the opportunity to observe the phenomena of a refugee influx in the context of a small, previously-homogenous but increasingly diverse city.

Research Questions

This is a qualitative case study of the resettlement sector as it works to implement the policy of resettling Syrian refugees. It analyzes the experiences of sector actors in Saskatoon following the initial resettlement of Syrians. It seeks to answer the following research questions, through interviews of SPO employees, and their organizations' government and community partners, as well as a process of participant observation:

1. What were the biggest challenges for street-level bureaucrats in the early stages of carrying out the Syrian refugee initiative?
2. How did the sector address and cope with these challenges?

3. What lessons can be learned from this process that can inform similar future processes? By answering these questions, this study provides insights into the functioning of the resettlement system under pressure, the strengths and weaknesses of the system as it exists, and the policy implications for carrying out similar, future initiatives.

Thesis Structure and Findings

Structure

This thesis is laid out in four chapters. Chapter One outlines the policy environment in which refugee resettlement in Canada occurs. This includes relevant international laws and regulations, the structure of Canada's immigrant and refugee settlement system, the position of non-profit organizations in the 'third sector' that provide services within that system, and the challenges that typically exist in that system. It also outlines the refugee resettlement process in Canada, and specifically the role of the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP).

Chapter Two outlines the qualitative methods used for this study, which included semi-structured interviews with workers at settlement organizations in Saskatoon and government officials, as well as participant observation. Chapter Three presents the theoretical framework that combines the concept of street-level bureaucrats with the literature on policy evaluation and policy learning. Chapter Four outlines the study's findings, which includes a description of how the process unfolded from the perspective of those who were directly involved, as well as the challenges that emerged from the initiative, the ways that workers dealt with those challenges, and the lessons they learned as a result. The Conclusion discusses the limitations of the study and potential avenues for future research, as well as the policy implications of the study.

Findings

This qualitative assessment of the Syrian refugee resettlement process in Saskatoon revealed a process of policy learning emerging from a situation of great pressure. The Syrian initiative

exposed weaknesses in the existing system with which street-level bureaucrats had to contend. Presented with an overwhelming strain on their system, time, and resources, street-level bureaucrats at Saskatoon SPOs performed a real-time evaluation of the system in which they work, and devised solutions to issues as they arose. Street-level bureaucrats, by definition, create policy at the community level where they carry out their work, and therefore this process resulted in incremental changes to the system. In the context of Saskatoon's multiple SPOs that share the responsibilities of providing services to refugees, issues of coordination need to be addressed, and in the world of non-profit organizations, additional resources must always be found. Through the process of finding ways to address these issues, street-level bureaucrats can learn and strengthen the system in which they work. Using Hugh Heclo's conception of policy learning as an unconscious process spurred by exogenous environmental forces, this thesis finds that the Syrian initiative forced policy actors through a learning process that ultimately resulted in a stronger, more cohesive system.

Chapter 1: Policy Environment

This chapter outlines the resettlement system from the international level to the federal level, and finally to the community level where refugees are provided with services by street-level bureaucrats at local SPOs. It also discusses the construction of Canada's 'third sector', in which government funds non-profit organizations to provide services on its behalf, and the role of SPOs within this system. Finally, it provides an overview of the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) through which newly-arrived refugees receive the initial essential services they need to resettle into their new community. This chapter gives a picture of the policy environment in which the Syrian initiative was carried out, and the potential strengths and weaknesses that exist within it.

International refugee policy

The UNHCR formally outlined the rights of refugees for the first time in its 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. This post-World War II document defined a refugee as a person who:

as a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (14)

A vital piece of the Convention is the concept of *non-refoulement*, which states that a refugee cannot be returned by a contracting state to a territory where his or her life or freedom is threatened (Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, 2010).

The specificity of the date in the definition designated a refugee as someone displaced specifically by the events of the Second World War. This changed in 1967 when the Protocol to

the Convention was adopted, which removed reference to the date and made the term applicable to people at any time, from any country in the world. The definition is also specific in its reference to those who fear persecution, which precludes the acceptance of those who flee conflict in general. This, according to Joseph Carens (2013) is evidence that the Convention's priorities are misplaced: importance should not be placed solely on whether a person is individually targeted on one of the grounds outlined in the definition, but rather on the threat to their basic human rights and the degree of risk they face. UNHCR does adopt this more expansive interpretation in practice, recognizing that refugees are persons "who are outside their country of nationality or habitual residence and unable to return there owing to serious and indiscriminate threats to life, physical integrity or freedom resulting from generalized violence or events seriously disturbing public order" (2011: 19).

According to UNHCR, there were 16.1 million refugees under its mandate in 2015, of which only 107,100 were formally resettled (2016). Fifty-three per cent of refugees in that year were from Somalia (1.1 million), Afghanistan (2.7 million) and Syria (4.9 million) (UNHCR, 2016b). Developing countries bordering conflict are the hosts of most of the world's refugees: more than half of Syrians who fled in the first half of 2016 stayed in countries in their immediate region — Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt (UNHCR, 2017a). In mid-2016 Turkey hosted the most refugees of any country (2.8 million), followed by Pakistan (1.6 million) and Lebanon (1 million) (UNHCR, 2017a).

There is no global system or series of agreements for equitable distribution or acceptance of refugees, and each sovereign state has the right to accept or reject the claims of anyone who crosses — or wishes to cross — its borders (UNHCR, 2015). The Refugee Convention itself recognizes that "grant of asylum may place unduly heavy burdens on certain countries, and ... a

satisfactory solution of a problem of which the United Nations has recognized the international scope and nature cannot therefore be achieved without international co-operation” (13). As refugee numbers have increased, however, many states have simultaneously increased the restrictions on those seeking asylum or resettlement.

In *The Ethics of Immigration*, Carens argues that, because the world has been organized into a system of states in which “all of the inhabited land is divided up among (putatively) sovereign states who possess exclusive authority over what goes on within the territories they govern, including the right to control and limit entry”, countries have a responsibility to take in those whom the state system has failed (2013: 196). Though a state should not be expected to take in more refugees than it can support at the expense of its own citizens, Carens proposes that refugee resettlement be considered a moral duty in the international community (2013). States have recognized the need for international cooperation in finding solutions for the number of displaced persons, but stop short of creating a framework for how the responsibility should be shared (Mathew & Harley, 2016). The result is an arbitrary and inequitable system in which developing countries continue to bear the weight of refugee numbers (Mathew & Harley, 2016). The system is therefore skewed by proximity to conflict rather than a state’s absorptive capacity, placing undue burden on countries who are often least able to support it.

Canadian approach to refugee resettlement

During the timeframe in which this initiative occurred, Canada gained a reputation for generosity towards refugees. Prime Minister Trudeau’s approach stood in stark contrast to that of other Western industrialized countries. At the beginning of his term in 2017, American President Donald Trump tried twice to ban Syrian refugees outright, as well as temporarily suspend

acceptance of refugees from around the world (Singhvi & Parlapiano, 2017). During the Brexit campaign, some leaders in the United Kingdom used the fear of asylum seekers entering mainland Europe to strengthen their stance on leaving the European Union (Stewart & Mason, 2016). Australia has implemented a series of detention centres on islands outside its territory in which it imprisons indefinitely asylum seekers who have tried to reach its mainland (Davidson, 2016). Compared to the rhetoric and policies of political leaders in these countries, Canada was seen as an exemplar of a welcoming, well-structured refugee resettlement system.

It is true that Canada is “no slouch when it comes to refugee admission” (Fleras, 2015: 174). In 1979 and 1980 Canada accepted over 60,000 refugees fleeing Southeast Asia, many of whom were privately sponsored by Canadian citizens (CIC, 2015). As a result of the success of this process, the private sponsorship of refugees was formally enshrined in Canada’s refugee resettlement policy (CIC, 2015). In 1986 “the people of Canada” were awarded the UNHCR’s Nansen Medal, which recognizes work done to protect refugees globally: it was the first and only time the award has been given to an entire country (Fleras, 2015).

Canada has resettled other large groups of refugees in its history. In 1956-57 it took in 37,500 Hungarians; in 1968-69, 11,500 Czechs; in 1972, 6,000 Asians who were expelled from Uganda; in 1973, 7,000 Chileans; and in 1999-2000, 7,000 Kosovars under “Operation Parasol”, among others (Fleras, 2015). Its policy of allowing private citizens to sponsor refugees has remained largely unique in the world until 2016, when other countries looked for ways to deal with the unprecedented number of global refugees (Shane, 2017). In December 2016, government representatives from Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Chile, Germany, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States attended a three-day Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative in Ottawa to learn more about the Canadian system (Shane, 2017).

Despite its status as a global leader in refugee acceptance and resettlement at the time of writing, Canada has not always been so welcoming to people seeking refuge. Though it has increased the number of *refugees* it resettled from overseas, the exclusionary rhetoric and policies affecting *asylum seekers* has mirrored that of other nations. Perhaps most famously, when Jewish refugees from Germany requested asylum in Canada in 1939 from aboard the ship *The St. Louis*, they were refused and eventually sent back to the Nazis (Tolley, 2011).

Because Canada can maintain an orderly refugee resettlement process due largely to geography, the refugees it accepts have undergone the long process of being vetted by UNHCR or states and accepted by Canadian visa officers, before being flown into the country. When asylum seekers (or ‘refugee claimants’, as they are referred to in Canada) have attempted to enter Canada by boat, however, the reaction has been exclusionary. In 2010, a ship called *The Sun Sea* arrived off the coast of British Columbia with 492 Sri Lankan asylum seekers aboard; the then-Conservative government detained the claimants, including women and children, despite the Immigration and Refugee Board’s (IRB) finding that they had a “well-founded fear of persecution” (Knowles, 2016: 274). Following the incident, the government passed the Preventing Human Smugglers from Abusing Canada’s Immigration System Act (Bill C-4), under which the government could designate certain claimants as “irregular arrivals” and detain them without IRB review for one year (CCR, 2011).

Other policy reforms under Stephen Harper’s Conservative government included Bill C-31 — The Protecting Canada’s Immigration System Act — which modified the refugee determination process in order to decrease a backlog of claims. Enacted in December 2012, the bill created a list of countries considered “safe” and therefore unlikely to produce refugees, and made it much more difficult for claimants from those countries to remain in Canada (Knowles,

2016). It also gave the Minister the power to designate who constitutes an “irregular arrival” and can be subjected to detention (Taylor, 2015). Also in 2012, the government cut Interim Federal Health Program benefits for claimants who were waiting for their cases to be processed, or whose claims had been rejected (Knowles, 2016).

Though Canada projected a generous approach to refugee acceptance during the Syrian initiative, its generosity extended to those who are accepted specifically through its overseas resettlement process, and not those who claim asylum without being approved in advance. Canada’s generosity towards the displaced has been conditional on the government in power, and the way in which those seeking protection have entered the country.

Policy and Legislation

Canada’s obligations to refugees under the 1951 Convention, which it signed in 1969, were first enacted with the passage of the *Immigration Act of 1976* (Knowles, 2016). The inclusion of refugees as a specific category, separate from immigrants, was “an important innovation” in policy (Knowles, 2016: 209) which established determination criteria for a process that had previously been based on cabinet orders-in-council and ad hoc decisions (Knowles, 2016; Gogia & Slade, 2011). The inclusion of a refugee category in the 1976 Act, along with the arrival of large numbers of Indochinese refugees in the late 1970s, focused public attention on the needs of refugees; a number of non-profit organizations dedicated to meeting these needs were created during this time period (Canadian Council for Refugees, 1998). Policy-makers were, at this time, focused on creating policy that was fair and would offer the best possible protection for refugees (Irvine, 2011).

In 2002 the Canadian government again overhauled immigration policy with the introduction of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (IRPA). Canada’s commitment to

humanitarianism in its immigration policy is laid out explicitly in the IRPA, and located in relevant parts of the Act (Dauvergne, 2005). The legislation, created in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, also had the goal of “tightening” Canada’s refugee system (Irvine, 2011). Two major changes made by the Act, which reflect the impact of globalization, move in opposite directions: the new legislation cracked down on migration violations, and simultaneously made it easier for well-qualified economic migrants to be accepted (Dauvergne, 2003). Irvine (2011) argues that a shift from a refugee protection paradigm to a security-control paradigm reframed Canada’s international obligations to refugees as a limit to its sovereignty, and refugees as a threat rather than a vulnerable population. The changes made to the Act since its passage (including Bill C-4 and Bill C-31, listed above) reinforce and enhance the security-control paradigm. There are signs this paradigm may be shifting: under the Liberal government the name of the ministry changed from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) to Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) signaling an increased focus on and acceptance of refugee protection within the government’s mandate.

The IRPA outlines two avenues for refugee protection claims: they can be made either outside or inside Canada. A claim made outside Canada “must be made by making an application for a visa as a Convention refugee or a person in similar circumstances” (IRPA, 2015: 78); inside Canada, a claimant must be made to an “officer” so their claim can be referred to the Refugee Protection Division within a three-day period. The Syrian refugees accepted to Canada were assessed and made their claim outside the country, and therefore were granted Permanent Resident status upon arrival.

Canada's settlement sector

Like many social services, newcomer and refugee services and programs are provided not directly by government, but by non-profit organizations in the “third sector”. To understand this approach to service provision, this section will outline the structure of the third sector and settlement organizations’ place within it. It is within this structure and context that the street-level bureaucrats studied for this thesis carry out their work, cope with issues that emerge, and shape policy at the community level.

The Third Sector in Canada

The ‘third sector’ is a term used to describe organizations that exist outside the private and public sector, whose purpose is to serve others and work for the public good (Evans & Shields, 2000).

The third sector includes funding agencies, member-serving organizations, public benefit organizations, and religious organizations, guided by the values of “philanthropy, altruism, charity, reciprocity, mutuality and the ethic of giving and caring” (Evans & Shields, 2000:2). Though privately-run, organizations in the third sector do not seek to make a profit (Evans & Shields, 2000).

New Public Management (NPM), a system structured around neo-liberal principles, is a prevalent guiding force throughout Canada’s third sector (Evans, Richmond, & Shields, 2004). The NPM approach to public administration came to prominence in the 1980s and 1990s in numerous OECD countries, where central state activities were transferred to various semi-autonomous bodies (James & Thiel, 2011). As the government sought to shrink deficits and the state, it devolved responsibility for many social services to members of the third sector (Creese, 1998). This was seen as a reaction against the system of providing standardized services through a model of hierarchical and lifetime career organizations separate from the rest of the economy

(Norman, 2011). The result was what James and Thiel refer to as ‘agencification’, where politicians charge bureaucrats with tasks, which are then delegated to external agencies (2011). This is meant not only to increase efficiency, but also to de-politicize certain tasks by distancing them from politicians (James & Thiel, 2011).

Under the NPM approach prescribed policies are meant to be more tailored, responsive, and efficient (Norman, 2011). Its initial creators and implementers drew on the ideas of managerialism, which indicated that the public and private sectors were not exceedingly different and should be managed on similar bases (Boston, 2011). This has resulted in a preference in public service provision for devolution of responsibilities by contracting out services via short-term, tightly-specified agreements, improved monitoring and accountability mechanisms, and a focus on quantifiable output and performance targets (Boston, 2011).

According to Hall and Reed (1998), this ‘downloading’ of services by the government to the third sector via contracts is guided by the belief that charities provide lower-cost, more efficient methods of social service provision. Advocates of this system claim non-profits have greater flexibility than government, and are better-acquainted with the individual issues in their communities, which makes them a more suitable choice for service delivery than the government (Hall & Reed, 1998). However, cost savings are often achieved with greater use of volunteers rather than staff, and this is generally true only in smaller, non-unionized organizations (Hall & Reed, 1998). The consequences of downloading, they argue, are reduced availability and variety of social programs, geographically uneven service coverage, and a shift in priorities to more revenue-generating programs. When governments contract out services while simultaneously cutting funding, it exacerbates these issues (Hall & Reed, 1998).

The result of this downloading is a ‘mixed social economy’ wherein third-sector

organizations deliver services, but government maintains the authority to dictate what kind of services are delivered, and *how* they are delivered (Evans & Shields, 2000). Under this model, government asserts that they are partnering with the third sector to deliver social services; critics of the model claim it is in fact a top-down, ‘command and control’ relationship with the organizations that deliver services on government’s behalf, rather than a true ‘partnership’ (Evans & Shields, 2000). In guarding itself from a loss of political autonomy, the government creates a ‘shadow state’ of the third sector, which holds it at arms-length, but controls it through contracts and heavy administrative accountability measures (Evans & Shields, 2000).

Laforest (2011) argues that what she calls ‘voluntary organizations’ have carved out a place for themselves in the public policy sphere. She conceptualizes a governance model in which the public, private, and voluntary (or third) sectors must collaborate and share responsibilities in order to adequately address complex social issues (2011). Voluntary organizations should be treated as agents of change whose actions influence the shape and direction of governance as the state and third sector become increasingly interdependent (Laforest, 2011). Actors within this system make decisions based both on high-level policy debates and issues, but also on their own experiences and their understanding of governance dynamics (Laforest, 2011). “More than ever before,” she notes, “voluntary organizations are important players and partners in both policy making and service delivery” (13).

Third sector challenges under NPM

This shift to an NPM approach is seen clearly in the Canadian settlement sector, where service delivery is off-loaded from government to non-profits using short-term, competitive, program-based contracts (Shields et al., 2016). Constructed in this way, the settlement sector experiences some burdens and constraints. These issues generally fall under the challenges of funding,

accountability, and advocacy.

Funding challenges

Richmond and Shields write extensively about Canada's third sector, and settlement services specifically. They are often critical of the funding structure in immigrant settlement and integration as it has evolved under the NPM approach, calling it "increasingly limited, unstable, and restrictive" (2005: 515). They define contract funding as "the purchase of defined services with specified outputs and closely-controlled funding, usually accompanied by increased accountability requirements with little or no flexibility in program delivery or funding" (2004: 56).

Under the NPM model, government not only contracts-out services, it deliberately underfunds them, expecting that volunteers and donations from the public will fill the gaps (Richmond & Shields, 2004; Shields et. al, 2016). Garcea's 2013 study indicated that "most, if not all, agencies need more financial and human resources to meet their needs in providing programs and services designed to meeting the settlement and integration needs of newcomers" (24).

Administrative and accountability burdens

The contract-based funding structure gives government increased ability to determine how money is used. Contracts are awarded on the basis that funds will be spent and programs delivered in precisely the manner outlined in those contracts (Shields et al., 2016). To ensure this, strict accountability measures are put in place by which service providers must abide. Complying with these measures becomes an administrative reporting burden that may take up 20 per cent of the contract's value, though this is not accounted for in the allotted funding (Evans, Richmond & Shields, 2004).

This increased accountability to funders and their desired program outcomes has meant decreased accountability to agencies' newcomer clients (Shields et. al., 2016). This "continuous balancing act" of managing multiple accountabilities pulls "valuable personnel, capital and time resources away from actual program delivery, which often negatively impacts the agency's service outcomes" (Shields et. al., 2016: 15).

Applying for funds for future programs is another burden on SPO staff's time, which is not considered part of existing contracts, and eats away the time of those who are otherwise meant to be delivering services (Richmond & Shields, 2004). In one study, a participant and SPO staff member reported completing numerous, lengthy, grant proposals, of which they were awarded about half (Creese, 1998). This process of applying for unstable, inadequate, funding is a considerable drain on time and resources.

Advocacy chill

Canada's service delivery model is structured so that organizations deliver services, but are limited in their ability to influence public policy (Phillips, 2010). Organizations that are under-resourced, have staff that spend their time fulfilling accountability requirements by writing reports, and applying for grants to keep their organizations afloat (and to secure their own employment), do not also have time to advocate for change on behalf of their clients (Evans, Richmond & Shields, 2004). That the source of their funding is also the government who creates policy makes organizations reluctant to bite the hand that feeds them. The result is an 'advocacy chill', wherein organizations "self-regulate their engagement in policy advocacy" (Phillips, 2010: 69). Government funders do not seem to recognize the value that is lost due to advocacy chill: under the current contracting regime advocacy is discouraged, and SPO's role in the sector "curtails their ability to offer alternative perspectives" (Richmond & Shields, 2004: 56). In a

2014 study, an employee of a Saskatchewan SPO commented that there was no visible form of engagement with the government, but rather one of command and control: “[we are] told what to do, and that is what we must do” (Evans & Shields, 2014: 122).

Settlement sector-specific challenges

Service providers across Canada note that narrow mandates and lack of coordination lead to many people who need their services falling through the cracks (Simich et. al, 2005). A study of settlement workers based on agencies in Toronto, Edmonton, and Vancouver, found three major challenges to newcomer service provision: limited resources, lack of integration of policies and programs, and narrow mandates that prevent helping newcomers holistically (Simich, Beiser, Stewart & Mwakarimba, 2005). They found that refugees face more barriers to integration than other newcomers to Canada (2005). Though SPO staff have a great deal of hands-on experience and are excellent sources of insight about the needs of their clients, they have little authority to influence higher-level policy; their ideas are rarely heard or integrated by those ‘higher up’ (Maynard-Moody, Musheno, & Palumbo, 1990; Evans & Shields, 2014).

Information-sharing and referrals between SPOs are often lacking, as is cultural competency among staff (CDCD, 2010). Others note that the focus on NPM in service provision ignores the systemic barriers that exist for newcomers: instead of focusing on individuals as solutions to labour market issues, service providers should be empowered to address these barriers (Thomas, 2015).

Changes in refugee policy by the Conservative government since 2006, and by the previous Liberal government, have left immigrant and refugee service providers in Canada with limited resources (Simich, Beiser, Stewart & Mwakarimba, 2005). Service providers and policy-

makers have noted that the challenges they face are linked to the problems of immigrant marginalization, political discourse, and funding cuts (Simich et al., 2005).

The resettlement process in Canada: from the federal to the local level

There is a distinct difference between immigrants and refugees from an entry-process standpoint. Immigrants are those who voluntarily choose Canada as a place they want to live, and apply for permanent status usually based on family reunification or their ability to contribute to the economy (Fleras, 2015). Refugees, in contrast, are forced to leave their home countries, and do not request to come to Canada specifically: their cases are assessed usually by UNHCR, which then chooses potential resettlement countries to which it submits their case for approval (UNHCR, 2011). Once they arrive in Canada, however, refugees approved from outside the country are given Permanent Resident status and have the same rights as those who arrived by other means.

Since Confederation, there has been an ongoing debate between the federal and provincial governments about which level of government has authority over various aspects of immigration policy. Though generally under the purview of the federal government, provinces have long wanted a say in the level and recruitment of immigrants. Until the 1970s immigration policy was often created without consultation or input from the provinces (Vineberg, 2011). A full-scale review of the immigration system that began in 1973 acknowledged that collaboration between levels of government was necessary on various fronts, including “cooperation on immigrant services beginning with a joint evaluation of needs” (Vineberg, 2011: 27). This review and consultation process resulted in the *Immigration Act of 1976*, which included a mandate for the federal government to consult with provinces regarding

“the measures to be undertaken to facilitate the adaptation of permanent residents...and the pattern of immigrant settlement in Canada in relation to regional demographic requirements” (Vineberg, 2011: 28). The resulting system of bilateral agreements between the federal and provincial governments is one of complex decentralization, mostly where *immigrants* are concerned. Each province has a different agreement with the federal government, resulting in substantial policy asymmetry across the country.

Saskatchewan

Five distinct intergovernmental relationship models exist for settlement agreements between the federal and provincial governments: the Canada-Saskatchewan Immigration Agreement is defined as a “consultation model” under which the federal government retains the power to make final decisions about programs, which are delivered through local IRCC offices and SPOs (Banting, 2012).

Saskatchewan’s agreement with the federal government outlines the roles and shared responsibilities in newcomer settlement and integration, which include collaborating and consulting in immigration planning, participating in local mechanisms for settlement and integration, and to being mindful of Canada’s multicultural and bilingual nature when constructing policies (CIC, 2005). The provincial government is responsible for “special settlement support needs” that arise from the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program (SINP), and the federal government is responsible for immediate essential services for GARs that live in Saskatchewan (Garcea, 2011). In this way the provincial government has gained varied powers and responsibilities over immigrants, while the federal government retains control of refugee acceptance, resettlement, and funding for GARs’ first year in Canada. Though provincial governments have little oversight when it comes to refugee resettlement, refugees are eligible for

provincial social assistance once their federal funding ends, and at least 93 per cent of GARs receive at least one month of social assistance due to remaining barriers to employment after their first year in the country (IRCC, 2016).

Saskatchewan has seen three inter-related trends emerge in its settlement sector: an expansion of the number of government and non-government actors involved, and expansion of their roles in the sector, and an increase in volume and variety of settlement and integration services available (Garcea, 2011). Though these trends are regarded as positive, challenges remain. Conflict arises over a lack of clarity about which level of government and/or organization is responsible for some roles of settlement and integration. Sector actors also report communication gaps between SPOs and levels of government, and between SPOs themselves (Kemp, 2014). This lack of coherence has resulted in silo-ization in the sector (Kemp, 2014). Despite increases in funding over the past decade, it's also true that no organization has access to adequate resources to provide all the services that are needed: this capacity gap is one that government and SPOs continuously struggle to narrow (Garcea, 2011).

Until recently, Saskatchewan was not a province that received a large number of newcomers from other countries, nor, indeed, other parts of Canada. From 1991 to 2005, only five per cent of the province's population was comprised of immigrants (Garcea, 2011). Over the next decade, however, that number steadily increased, largely in response to a strong economy in the province (Garcea, 2013); from 2008 to 2012, Saskatchewan's immigrant population grew 130 per cent (Kemp, 2014). Saskatoon specifically has seen an influx of immigrants, making it an increasingly diverse city (Garcea, 2013). This has meant a corresponding increase in the clients of settlement SPOs. Though immigrants and refugees are accepted to Canada through different processes, services for both categories of newcomers are provided by the same

organizations; while some of these are designated only for GARs, most are available to any newcomer who needs them.

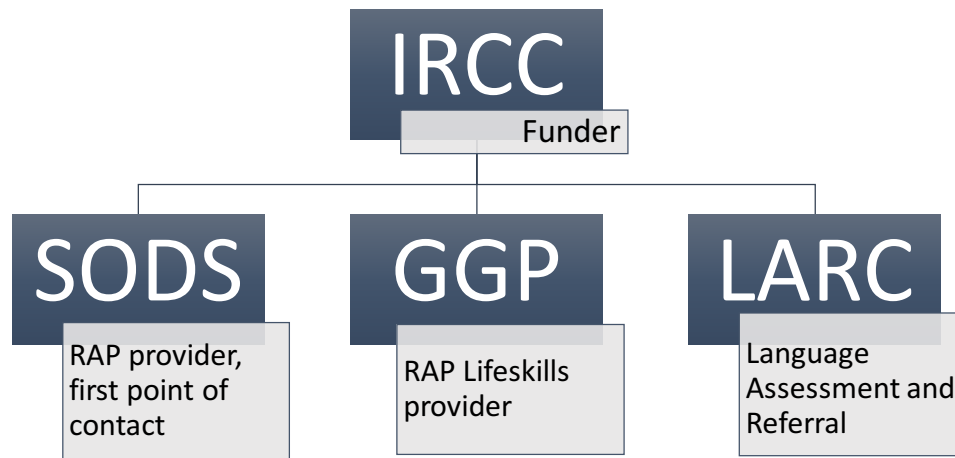


Figure 1. Structure of Resettlement Services in Saskatoon

Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP)

When GARs arrive in Canada they are provided income support and essential services through the federally-funded RAP. There are SPOs in 23 communities across Canada that deliver RAP services to refugees when they arrive in their destination communities: these include being met at the airport by staff, temporary initial and then permanent accommodation, basic orientation about Canada including life skills and financial orientation, and access to English or French language classes (CIC, 2015). The income support given to refugees during their first year is commensurate with the social assistance rates in the province where they are resettled; this allowance includes an initial start-up payment to cover household furnishing, goods, and fees for utility installation, and ongoing monthly payments to cover rent, utilities, food, and incidentals (CIC, 2015). Refugees are also eligible for Canada's Child Tax Benefit (Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, 2016), and their health care costs are covered by the Interim

Federal Health Program (IFHP) until they are eligible for a provincial health card (IRCC, 2015).

RAP has been in place since 1998, when it replaced what was known as the Adjustment Assistance Program (CIC, 2011). Prior to the redesign of the program, services had been provided directly by CIC; RAP's implementation transferred service provision to third-party contractors (i.e. SPOs), though CIC maintains the income support portion of the program, and plays the funding and oversight roles (CIC, 2011). CIC's 2011 evaluation of RAP found several advantages to this structure of service provision, including SPOs' ability to provide a wide range of services that may not be available through government provision alone, and that they have a good understanding of their local communities and are linked to other community services, providing better over-all resources to their clients.

The same evaluation, however, found a number of weaknesses in RAP. Key among those findings was that the income support provided to refugees was inadequate, and that using provincial income assistance rates to calculate income support was not appropriate (CIC, 2011). Findings suggested that 57 per cent of GARs were accessing food banks, 61 per cent had difficulties paying back the transportation loan, and 33 per cent listed financial issues as their biggest source of difficulty in the resettlement process (CIC, 2011). The Child Tax Benefit, which provides benefits to families for each child under 18, is a critically important source of funding for families given the limited nature of their federal income support (Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, 2016).

Generally, refugees are loaned money from the federal government to cover the cost of their flight to Canada, which must be repaid within one to six years (Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, 2016). These travel loans were waived for Syrians resettled during this initiative; for GARs in general, however, this loan increases their financial hardship (Standing

Senate Committee on Human Rights, 2016).

In 2016, IRCC conducted an evaluation of its resettlement programs which echoed the income-related concerns of the previous RAP evaluation. Its first recommendation was that policy options be developed to ensure refugees have a sufficient level of support to ensure their successful resettlement and integration (IRCC, 2016).

The evaluations also found that SPOs wanted more flexibility built into RAP. Counsellors delivering RAP felt their resources were at maximum capacity due to the short amount of time they had to provide new refugees with services, especially those who had high medical needs (CIC, 2011). The most recent evaluation indicated that GARs with high needs should be given more time to receive RAP services to ensure they are able to absorb all the necessary information (IRCC, 2016). Workers at SPOs said they would like more flexibility in the number of hours they spend with each client, the kinds of services they can offer (to meet the specific needs of GARs), and the length of time they have to deliver the services (CIC, 2011). The 2011 evaluation also noted that “GAR arrival patterns can overburden SPOs if large numbers arrive in a short time frame” (29).

Another shortcoming noted in both the 2011 and 2016 RAP evaluations is the need for more and better information sharing platforms: the 2016 report calls for improving or developing information sharing mechanisms. Though it notes that a pilot project on medical record transfers had gone ahead, there were still issues to work through with sharing medical information across various partners. It also pointed out a gap in the ability to share best practices across offices (IRCC, 2016).

Though refugees continue to receive income support through RAP for their first year in Canada, the services provided through the program are accessible for around the first six weeks.

The services provided are centred around getting refugees set up in their homes and oriented to various aspects of life in Canada; once this time has passed, refugees are transferred from their RAP counsellor to a Needs Assessment and Referral Service (NARS) counsellor. These counsellors work only in the office of the SPO, and provide services to all newcomers rather than just refugees. After their initial set-up and orientation through RAP, NARS counsellors are there to help refugees with support services, referrals to training programs, school registration, developing action plans, and other services (SODS, 2016).

The system through which refugees must navigate to be resettled in a Canadian community is long, multi-level, stringent, and politically-charged. Becoming one of the 1 per cent (UNHCR, 2017b) of refugees globally who make it through this system from beginning to end and achieve Permanent Resident status and support in Canada is akin to winning the lottery. At what some might consider the ‘end’ of the process — arrival and resettlement in a community — a new and difficult process begins: that of adapting to and thriving in a new cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic environment.

Within this context, street-level bureaucrats at SPOs facilitate the process of resettlement and integration. They must help extremely vulnerable clients with limited resources navigate a new and unfamiliar context and make a home. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, street-level bureaucrats always work in situations of scarce resources, and while the federal government did provide additional funding to address resource needs during the Syrian resettlement initiative, this system underwent a great deal of strain. As Chapter 4 will show, the shortcomings identified in previous evaluations of RAP were evident during this process, and street-level bureaucrats needed to find ways to address them and other challenges as they strove to complete the process.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This thesis is a qualitative case study of the Syrian refugee settlement process in Saskatoon. To find answers to the research questions regarding the biggest challenges, problem-solving strategies, and lessons that evolved from the process, it used semi-structured interviews and participant observation to analyze the initial stages of this initiative.

The data for this study came from 13 semi-structured interviews with participants from a variety of sources. Over half of these included actors who work for Saskatoon SPOs and were involved in the direct provision of services needed to complete the Syrian resettlement process. Other participants included representatives from the federal, provincial, and municipal governments with knowledge of how the settlement system works and how the process unfolded. In this way, with data from participants both internal and external to direct service provision, this study was able to analyze this process from multiple perspectives. In addition to interviews, I conducted participant observation throughout the Syrian resettlement process to gain a more holistic understanding of what it looked like in real time.

Case study

A case study is defined by Yin as an investigation of “a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (2003: 13). Researchers use case studies when they cannot manipulate the behaviour of those involved, and because they believe contextual conditions are a significant component to understanding the phenomenon (Yin, 2003). Case studies typically rely on multiple sources of data to explore a given situation (Yin, 2003).

A case study was an ideal format for this research, which utilized a single-case design that focused on the delivery of RAP services during this timeframe as its unit of analysis. It

explores the effects of the current policy context on the delivery of services from the perspective of those on the ground. This combination of interviews and participant observation allowed for a measure of triangulation, which gives a fuller picture of the phenomenon.

Unlike typical case studies, this thesis was not based on a pre-defined theoretical framework (Yin, 2003). Because it captured a unique process as and shortly after it unfolded, the chosen framework on policy learning discussed in the next chapter was constructed based on the data that emerged from participant interviews.

Research that looks at policy implementation has often been referred to as “misery research” due to researchers’ tendency to focus only on the ways implementation has failed (McLaughlin, 2006). This data collection for this study did not assume, nor aim to illuminate, only failures of this process, but sought to assess what worked well, and what did not.

Interviews

Interviews are “one of the most important sources of case study information” (Yin, 2003: 89). For this thesis they were the main avenue for gathering first-hand information from the people directly involved in the implementation of policy, and allow them to reflect on the day-to-day realities of the process.

Participants for this study were recruited through a process of purposive sampling, in which they were “selected according to the researcher’s own knowledge and opinion about which ones they think will be appropriate to the topic area” (David & Sutton: 152). The population on which I most wanted to focus were workers who provided services to refugees during the first phase of their resettlement in Saskatoon, whose workload was therefore the most hectic at the very beginning of the Syrian initiative as refugees began to arrive. I contacted the Executive Directors at Saskatoon SPOs that deliver services to newly-arrived refugees and asked

them to suggest employees in those roles that could speak about their experience during this timeframe. To recruit participants from the federal, provincial, and municipal governments I contacted the relevant departments and asked to be put in touch with appropriate representatives who could participate. These participants contributed some insight into the challenges that emerged, but also provided more information about the process as it unfolded from the perspective of their level of government. This gave a broader and more comprehensive picture of the context in which SPOs and their employees were working to complete their tasks.

Only two of the people contacted did not participate in interviews due to scheduling conflicts: in total I interviewed nine street-level bureaucrats from local organizations, one expert in the field of immigration and settlement, and one representative from each level of government: federal, provincial, and municipal. All interviews were recorded with a digital audio recorder and transcribed by myself. On average, the interviews lasted 45 minutes to one hour.

The interviews focused on the time-frame during which the sector prepared for and resettled the initial 25,000 refugees, when pressure on SPOs was the most intense; questions were aimed at collecting information about what happened during the months of December 2015 to March 2016, inclusive. Most of the interviews were conducted between June and September 2016, which allowed participants to reflect on events that had occurred in the recent past while they were still fresh in their minds. Capturing the emotions, challenges, and successes of policy implementation within this timeframe allowed for a more accurate assessment of the process than reflection on events that happened further in the past.

Semi-structured interviews consist of precise but open-ended questions, which allow the respondent significant leeway in their answers and in the direction of the conversation (Gagnon, 2010). In this way, respondents were able to address what they saw as the biggest successes and

challenges of resettling over 400 Syrian refugees in this short timeframe, and the ways their jobs might have been made easier. The semi-structured format allowed for follow-up and clarification questions, and for the respondent to add information they felt was pertinent but not addressed by the scripted questions. The interviews resulted in the majority of my data. (See Appendix for sample interview questions)

Participant observation

Using the participant observation method, the researcher “participates directly in the events” that are under investigation (Gagnon, 2010: 60), to gain a better understanding of the topic and the context of the study (Kawulich, 2005). This involves ‘focused observation’, wherein the phenomena observed was informed and supported by interviews (Kawulich, 2005). This process differed from traditional ethnography in that it does not incorporate the actions of individuals, but did inform my impressions of how the resettlement process worked.

Local SPOs provided a variety of avenues to volunteer during this process, and I took part in tutoring refugees in English in different capacities, helped to distribute donated clothing and household goods, and took part in volunteer training sessions offered by one organization. This provided insight into the role of volunteers in the resettlement process as well as the lived reality of refugee clients. Through this process I came into direct contact with volunteers, employees, and refugees themselves. The field notes collected in a journal regarding each volunteer shift took note of the number of newcomers who accessed the services, and what I observed to be working (or not working) well.

Though I did not use a template for my field notes, they describe my interactions with staff, volunteers, and refugees, who were not identified in my notes or reference in this thesis;

the experiences were analyzed for insight into how volunteers helped facilitate the settlement process. These experiences also helped to inform my interviews with participants.

Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed and analyzed through a process of coding. Coding is the “identification of common themes (words, phrases, meanings) within the data being analysed,” and is one of the most important aspects of qualitative analysis (David & Sutton, 2009: 195). Transcripts were analysed using an ‘open coding’ strategy (otherwise known as inductive coding), which does not employ a set of pre-determined codes (David & Sutton, 2009). Instead, this approach allowed codes to emerge from the data itself, which reduced the text into patterns and themes (David & Sutton, 2009). I also coded participant observation notes in the same fashion, to identify common challenges, issues, or successes that arose during my time as a volunteer.

Interview transcripts were coded using Nvivo software to organize and analyze the large amounts of textual data (David & Sutton, 2009). After uploading transcripts to Nvivo I systematically reviewed each document, creating nodes that represented key concepts in each interview. Through this process I was able to identify the themes that resulted in the narrative of how this process unfolded on the ground, including challenges and solutions, and the selection of my theoretical framework.

Ethical considerations

Though the participants interviewed for this study are not a vulnerable population, the clients with whom they work are. Through my participant observation I was also in direct contact with vulnerable refugees. Refugees themselves, however, are not the focus on this research, and it

does not identify individual refugees; only general information about situations is disclosed.

BEH ethics approval for this study was received December 21, 2015.

Through these qualitative methods this study captures a fulsome picture of the personal experiences of those who carried out the Syrian refugee resettlement process from both community and government perspectives. This data was rounded out with my own observations as a volunteer, which helped to shape my understanding of the issues and the way this paper conceptualizes the process.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

From its inception, this study set out to assess the role and situation of street-level bureaucrats as they carried out the process of Syrian refugee resettlement in early 2016. From the data collected from these street-level bureaucrats, a story emerged about the chaotic beginning of the process, followed by a rapid period of problem-solving, creativity, and coordination, and a system that emerged from the process that was more informed about its shortcomings and ways to improve upon them. This emergent narrative fit well with the work of Hugh Heclo (1974) who, as will be discussed in this chapter, presented a vision of policy learning that comes from changes in the external environment.

Heclo's theory, though it was shaped around government bureaucrats in the process of high-level policy making, aligned with what unfolded during the Syrian process. Street-level bureaucrats, as defined by Michael Lipsky (1980), make policy on the ground as they carry out their work and interpret the policies handed down to them. This study argues that, just as government bureaucrats 'muddle through' the creation of policy from on high, street-level bureaucrats undergo a parallel process in their own domain at the community level.

This chapter will outline the literature on street-level bureaucrats, starting with Lipsky's definition, and tie it to Heclo's version of policy learning. Policy learning falls under the evaluation stage within policy cycle literature, and this study conceptualizes the Syrian resettlement initiative as a process of real-time evaluation, carried out by street-level bureaucrats, that resulted in policy learning.

Street-level bureaucrats and their place in policy making

When public policies set out by government legislators filter down to where they connect with the public, often it is street-level bureaucrats who put policy into action (Lipsky, 1969). First

defined by Lipsky in 1969, street-level bureaucrats are public employees who interact with citizens in the course of their jobs, who have independence in the execution of their work, and who have extensive power to impact the lives of the people they serve. These workers include anyone whose job requires interpreting and carrying out policies created by governments, including teachers, police officers, health workers, and other public employees (Lipsky, 1980).

The decisions, routines, and coping mechanisms of street-level bureaucrats essentially *become* the policies they are asked to carry out (Lipsky, 1980; Meyers & Vorsanger, 2003; Brodtkin, 2011; Gofen, 2013). Lipsky argues that understanding policy involves not simply looking at the legislation issued from government offices, but from the perspective of its delivery by people in offices and on the streets in communities (1969). The face-to-face interaction between street-level bureaucrats who deliver policy and the people to whom they provide services and programs forms the ultimate shape of policy, which may look different in its final form than the way it was conceived by its authors. Street-level bureaucrats end up altering policy as a result of coping with the on-the-ground challenges in their daily work, including large caseloads, uncertainties about the methods they are expected to use, and the general unpredictability of clients (Lipsky, 1980).

Street-level bureaucrats always work under resource constraints: given the nature of their work, demand increases to meet the supply of services (Lipsky, 1980), and therefore they must always do their best with what they have (Brodtkin, 1997; Hupe & Buffat, 2014). Lack of resources is an unresolvable problem for street-level bureaucrats, because the number of people to whom they provide services is always fewer than actually are in need of help (Lipsky, 1980). Because of this lack of resources and the large caseloads they often deal with, street-level bureaucrats by definition must use their discretion to make policies work effectively in the real-

world situations they encounter. Much of what they do is not outlined in formal documents, and they must act in situations frequently defined only by vague norms (Hupe & Hill, 2002).

Maynard-Moody & Musheno note that “street-level work is, ironically, rule saturated but not rule bound” (2003, 8), and that “street-level decisions and actions are guided less by rules, training, or procedures and more by beliefs and norms, especially beliefs and norms about what is fair” (2003: 6). Their work is not about mindless compliance with a policy as it is handed down to them, but a process of “sense making” in which they use their knowledge base, experience, and beliefs to arrive at the best course of action (McLaughlin, 2006).

Because they have this level of discretion, street-level bureaucrats may have the power to determine whether a policy is successful. They may work to achieve the goals of the policymakers who established the policy, or they may subvert the policy by deliberately undermining its objectives or pursuing their own (Meyers & Vorsanger, 2003; Brodtkin, 2011; Tummers & Bekkers, 2014). They may also use their discretion to bridge gaps between the mandate of elected officials and the citizens they serve — in this way, street-level bureaucrats act as a check on policies, potentially improving the responsiveness and effectiveness of public policy on the ground (Meyers & Vorsanger, 2003). According to research by Maynard-Moody et al (1990), programs with more input from street-level bureaucrats are more successfully implemented.

Policy scholars often speak of “top-down” analysis of policies versus “bottom-up” analysis, which indicates the perspective from which its development and effectiveness is assessed. From a top-down perspective, a policy may be considered successful if what is achieved matches the expectations of policymakers who crafted it (Hill & Hupe, 2002). A bottom-up perspective, taken by scholars of street-level bureaucrats, assesses a policy from the

ground level (Hill & Hupe, 2002). According to Browne and Wildavsky this perspective is vital for understanding the scope and effects of policy, because “given the size and scope of contemporary government, most intelligence about events and their consequences has to come from close to the ground” (1983: 202). Barrett and Fudge (1981) argue that policy implementation should be seen as “getting something done” rather than simply compliance with stated objectives and procedures. This “policy-action” relationship is a process of interaction and negotiation, in which compromise is needed to achieve effective outcomes (Barrett & Fudge, 1981). The attitudes of street-level bureaucrats in this process may be more important than the amount of resources at hand in effectively implementing policy (Winter, 2002).

In this environment of ambiguity and scarce resources, street-level bureaucrats have a great deal of power to affect the lives of the members of the public they serve. The ways they choose to deliver services impact people’s lives and opportunities, and indeed shape the political and social context in which people act: their actions socialize people’s expectations of government services, determining their eligibility for and the treatment they receive in those programs (Lipsky, 1980). “Thus,” says Lipsky, “in a sense street-level bureaucrats implicitly mediate aspects of the constitutional relationship of citizens to the state. In short, they hold the keys to a dimension of citizenship” (1980: 4). Often it is the role of street-level bureaucrats to educate citizens about bureaucratic processes, and what is expected of them in their relations with the state (Lipsky, 1980).

Those who work in the Canadian system of refugee resettlement certainly fall into the category of street-level bureaucrats. Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) determines the country’s refugee policy, including the number of refugees that Canada accepts, to which communities they will be directed for resettlement, and the funding and services to

which they are entitled (IRCC, 2011). Resettlement services, however, are not carried out directly by government employees in Canada's NPM-influenced third sector framework: IRCC provides funding to non-profit organizations to deliver programs and services to newly arrived refugees (Biles, 2008). Despite not being directly employed by the federal government, these organizations and their workers receive federal funding to carry out their jobs, and therefore must comply with government direction and policy. In this way, they hold all of the power and work within all of the constraints of street-level bureaucrats outlined by Lipsky.

This thesis will also outline the contributions of people outside the sector and the effect they had on street-level bureaucrats ability to deliver services during this time. While these volunteers, health professionals, members of religious organizations, etc., did help do the work of resettling Syrian refugees, they are not considered street-level bureaucrats for the purpose of this study, as they are not employed for the purpose of delivering government-mandated services. Their contributions are notable, however — especially to illustrate how they affected the system in which street-level bureaucrats work.

Location within the Policy Cycle

This study and its findings take place at the intersection of the implementation and evaluation phases of the policy cycle. At its most basic, public policy is “anything a government chooses to do or not to do” (Dye, 1972: 2). In this study, public policy is both how the government has decided to construct the system of resettling refugees (a past and ongoing policy) and its decision to carry out the initiative of resettling Syrian refugees in 2015 and 2016. Policy *implementation* is defined by Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983: 20) simply as “carrying out of a basic policy decision” and is performed by street-level bureaucrats in their daily work. Policy *evaluation* is

generally seen as a phase of the policy cycle wherein the effectiveness of policy is formally analysed in terms of “its perceived intentions and results” (Gerston, 2010: 112). Evaluation research, according to Rossi and Berk (1981) “may be conducted to answer questions that arise during the formulation of policy, in the design of programs, in the improvement of programs, and in testing the efficiency and effectiveness of programs that are in place or being considered”. There is no “best way” to conduct this process, they note, given the diversity of policy questions to be answered, and a variety of perspectives and procedures is needed (Rossi & Berk, 1981).

In a series of chapters added in 1984 to an edition of Pressman and Wildavsky’s classic book “Implementation: How Great Expectations in Washington Are Dashed in Oakland”, Browne and Wildavsky articulate the ways in which the implementation and evaluation stages of the policy cycle intertwine:

The evaluator collects and analyzes data to provide information about program results. The implementer consumes this information, using it to check on past decisions and to guide future actions. Implementation is...about learning from evaluation. It is their production and consumption of information (that is, learning) that implementers and evaluators engage in complementary relationships. (1983a: 204)

This study argues that, in situations of great pressure like the Syrian refugee resettlement initiative, implementers become the evaluators, assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the system in which they work and making adjustments along the way. Browne and Wildavsky (1983b: 227, emphasis mine) point out that social policies and analyses of them evolve together: if the goal of policy analysis is to improve policymaking, they state, “implementation analysis must aim to improve program execution as it takes place. This adaptive analytical function should serve as a feedback mechanism. Policy objectives need not be blindly pursued but may be reconsidered *as they are pursued*”. Evaluation should be aimed at generating data that can improve implementation, and because implementation occurs constantly, evaluators can help to

understand why policies do or do not work. The distinction between implementation and evaluation can become blurred, the two fields merging into a “single-seamed concern with policy analysis” (Browne & Wildavsky, 1983a: 203).

Policy Learning

Within the academic policy literature, policy learning falls under the category of policy evaluation. Howlett et al. argue that a spectrum of policy evaluation exists: at one end, formal evaluation techniques are used by specialists to assess the impacts of policy; at the other end are critiques by the public, which include public protests of policies, and to whom the public gives their votes (2009). This definition articulates that policy evaluation can take a wide range of forms, from the formal to the informal.

Several scholars have put forward varied conceptions of what policy *learning* entails. Busenberg (2001) says policy learning is “a process in which individuals apply new information and ideas to policy decisions” (173); Howlett et al. (2009) define it as the beneficial “educational dynamic” stimulated by policy evaluation (179). Central to this study is Hugh Heclo’s view of policy learning (1974) which states that exogenous changes in the policy environment can cause unconscious learning to take place among policy-makers. For Heclo, policy-making is “a form of collective puzzlement on society’s behalf” (1974: 305) through which learning occurs. His 1974 book *Modern Social Politics in Britain and Sweden: From Relief to Income Maintenance*, argues that triggers in the policy environment lead policy-makers to struggle to find new policy solutions, both individually and collectively (1974). The learning that results from this process can mean “a relatively enduring alteration in behaviour that results from experience” (306). For policies to succeed, policy makers must adapt to the changing policy environment: “Social and

political events *move*. To understand public policy we must try to appreciate the mobile connections between factors — the real-life process of policy development and social politics” (1974: 304).

According to Heclo, social learning occurs at the individual level, but individuals interact to produce changed patterns of collective action (1974). His study looks mostly at the interaction between levels of policy-makers, where each level impinges on the others - high-level policy is often contingent on influence from policy sub-units. Though his focus is on this interaction between levels, he acknowledges that “group learning” also occurs within particular organizations, which grows from accumulated experiences (1974: 307). It is important to acknowledge, he says, that there is no one pattern of learning, or one policy process (1974): each process is based on its unique policy environment. Three features do, however, tend to be at play in the shaping of social policy and its effect on learning: 1) individual agents of change; 2) organizational inter-relationships; and 3) the impact of previous policy itself (Heclo, 1974).

Civil servants are at the heart of Heclo’s framework: they play the leading role in the evolution of policy serving to correct social conditions, as the actors most able to identify problems and devise alternatives to solve them (1974). As Lipsky has shown, the work of street-level bureaucrats often puts them in the role of policy makers on the ground, which aligns their position with that of civil servants who go through this process of assessing and adjusting policy. As the findings of this study show, street-level bureaucrats at Saskatoon SPOs went through precisely this process of confronting a triggering event, collectively puzzling through the process of what to do, and arriving at new solutions - some of which will be institutionalized and endure.

Unlike Heclo, Peter Hall (1993) conceptualizes policy learning as an endogenous process: ultimately he argues that learning depends on the influence of past policies on the actors

he sees as the drivers of policy-making: policy experts in a privileged position in a given field. His definition is that social learning is “a deliberate attempt to adjust the goals or techniques of policy in response to past experience and new information. Learning is indicated when policy changes as the result of such a process” (1993: 278). For Hall there are three features of social learning: 1) that one of the main factors “affecting policy at time-1 is policy at time-0”; 2) policy experts are the principal agents who advance the learning process; and 3) that the state has the capacity to have autonomy from societal pressure (1993: 277). His hierarchy of learning, similarly broken into three parts, outlines his assessment of how social learning progresses. First order learning consists of lessons regarding the settings of the instruments used in a given policy; these lessons are derived from previous experience. In second order learning, the use of the instruments themselves is considered; third order learning (the rarest of the three) entails a change to the goals behind the policy itself (1993).

This study takes Heclo’s view of policy learning and that it has occurred as a result of exogenous forces that lead to an *unconscious* learning process, as opposed to Hall’s perspective that learning is a *deliberate* attempt by experts to change policy. In Bennett and Howlett’s view (1992), it is possible to generate a synthesis of the perspective of policy learning scholars like Heclo and Hall, by articulating and accepting:

(a) that learning is in fact a complex, multi-tiered phenomenon which can affect either decision making organizations and processes; specific programs and instruments used to implement policy; and/or the ends to which policy is developed, and (b) that the agent of each type of learning will be different. (1992: 289)

Heclo’s concept of policy-making as an exercise in collective puzzlement aligns with Lindblom’s incrementalist ideas of “muddling through” the creation of policy. Lindblom outlines the “root and branch” methods of policy-making, and argues that the root approach — wherein

policy makers start from scratch to devise solutions — is impossible for complex problems. To start from the beginning each time a policy is devised “assumes intellectual capacities and sources of information that men simply do not possess” (Lindblom, 1959:80). Using the branch (or *successive limited comparisons*) approach, policy makers devise changes based on similar existing policies, which make marginal changes to the status quo. In this way, policy makers make the most of the knowledge available on a given subject, and fall back “on agreement wherever it can be found” (Lindblom, 1959: 84).

The successive limited comparisons approach recognizes the limits on human intellectual capacities to have comprehensive knowledge of any issue, and that complex problems must be simplified. This simplification happens in two ways: 1) “Through limitation of policy comparisons to those policies that differ in relatively small degree from policies presently in effect”, and 2) “empirical comparison of marginal difference among alternative policies” (ie. Only how proposed alternatives differ from the status quo) (Lindblom, 1959: 84). Reducing the policy options in this way is imperative given the complexity of problem-solving and the limits of human cognition.

Heclo speaks explicitly about incrementalism in his framework, as he identifies the ‘impact of previous policy’ is a key feature of policy change and learning. This incremental approach is the reason that changes made in the face of new situations are small, “because the new situation is responded to like something already known, or some element of it” (1974: 315). In a 2011 paper, Atkinson emphasizes and provides additional evidence for the persistence of the status quo in policy decision-making: the status quo’s three main advantages, he says, are the difficulty in challenging established patterns of dominance, that institutions tend to have built-in mechanisms for thwarting change, and that human cognitive constraints stand in the way of

comprehensive change (2011).

The branch approach, as Lindblom describes it, portrays policy evolution as a process of mutual adjustment, in which policy actors respond to incremental changes made by each other. These adjustments continuously interact and build on each other: “Policy is not made once and for all,” Lindblom (1959: 86) writes, “it is made and re-made endlessly”.

Using Hecló’s view that learning happens as a result of puzzling through situations brought on by the external environment, and Lipsky’s assessment of street-level bureaucrats as policy-makers, this study argues that the government’s initiative of bringing 25,000 Syrians to Canada was itself an evaluation of policy. This initiative did not change IRCC’s system of resettling refugees, but added intense pressure to that system by adding a large number of cases to be processed in a short amount of time. The pressure added by the Syrian refugee initiative exposed weaknesses in the system which were invisible or easier to deal with under normal system capacity; the hectic, high-pressure nature of this process exacerbated otherwise small issues, and forced actors to collaborate to create solutions as they went along. In this way, the process of implementing the Syrian refugee initiative was a real-time evaluation of Canada’s resettlement system, conducted by the street-level bureaucrats who do the on-the-ground work of carrying out policy intentions, with policy learning occurring as a result.

Chapter 4: Findings

The findings from this study are broken down into four sections. Because it looks at a phenomenon shortly after it unfolded, the first section is a description of the process as it happened. This description comes largely from participants who were able to provide an inside look at what happened, as this information was not yet available in any published material. These perspectives also provide more detail than what was covered in the media.

The following sections are an analysis of the process and how it was carried out by street-level bureaucrats, and are the result of the process of coding the data for themes. The second section outlines the challenges that emerged, which generally were caused by the intense pressure on the system, resources that were lacking, and coordination issues that occurred. The third section analyzes how street-level bureaucrats dealt with the issues that arose and the policy learning that occurred as a result. Finally, the discussion section ties this process to the literature laid out in the previous chapter.

All participants of this study are anonymous, and any direct quotes are cited with a ‘P’ (for ‘participant’) and the number that corresponds with their interview.

How the Syrian resettlement process unfolded

Justin Trudeau’s Liberal majority government took power November 4, 2015; on November 9 it announced a committee of cabinet members who would immediately begin working on the initiative to bring 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada (IRCC, 2015). The first government-sponsored plane of Syrian arrivals landed on December 10; though the initial campaign promise had been to meet that resettlement figure by the end of 2015, Canada reached the 25,000 milestone by the end of February, 2016 (Seidle, 2016). Even with this slightly-longer timeline,

the process created a great deal of pressure on the resettlement system, from the federal government down to the SPOs who delivered services to refugees at the community level.

At the federal level, IRCC began to prepare what it could, when it could. Because both parties had included plans to bring more Syrian refugees to Canada in their campaign platforms, bureaucrats in the immigration department knew that regardless of the election outcome they needed to prepare for an increase. When the Liberal party formed a majority government, IRCC began to mobilize; though it could not make changes prior to the swearing in of the new administration, it began speaking to representatives from the sector about how they could prepare. Following the October election, IRCC representatives of the prairie provinces arranged bi-weekly phone calls with provincial counterparts to discuss ideas about how best to proceed. These calls began to produce ideas; Alberta, for example, suggested that settlement umbrella organizations should have Syrian outreach coordinators that could compile data from the SPOs in their province and submit it to higher levels of government. IRCC representatives conducting conference calls with SPOs across the prairie region were able to “pollinate” each province with ideas they had heard from the others. Later in the process IRCC began having national conference calls to check with all RAP SPOs across the country.

Once the process was underway IRCC decided to activate the Federal Emergency Response Plan, usually used in the case of natural disasters, which in turn activated community-level emergency preparedness protocols. The local emergency committees were to help with the influx of large numbers of people; most were chaired by fire chiefs who know how to move large numbers of people.

At the community level, local meetings were taking place. The City of Saskatoon was tasked with coordinating in-person inter-sectoral meetings of important front-line partner

agencies (such as school boards, the health region, the police, faith groups, the Saskatoon Refugee Coalition, in addition to the settlement sector). These began weekly to keep each partner up-to-date with the process.

Those who work in the settlement sector said they felt few people outside the sector understood how refugee resettlement worked. Participants reported speaking to members of the public who were not aware that refugees were resettled in Saskatchewan on a regular basis, and agencies that did not regularly deal with immigration and refugee issues who did not know that a substantial resettlement system was already in place to deal with the Syrian initiative. Community-level meetings helped to spread knowledge of this system to other sectors. The provincial and municipal governments also requested to be briefed on the process: the provincial Ministry of the Economy (under which immigration initiatives fall) asked for a “Resettlement 101” presentation from the federal government to explain how the process worked, which parts were taken care of, and connection points to provincial mandates like healthcare and education. Saskatoon City Council received an information package from the federal government about Syria and its people, and was briefed by its Community Development branch about how it could best contribute to the resettlement process.

Until refugees started to land, information about how many would arrive in the city, or what the demographics would be was not available, given the speed and scale of the initiative. This is common in resettlement processes, but particularly overwhelming given these circumstances. Because this information was not immediately available, a general International Migration Organization (IOM) profile of Syrian refugees was used to gain an idea of possible ages, family sizes, and education levels of the people Canada had accepted. The IOM report, which indicated that Syrian refugees tended to be educated, have high levels of English, small

families, and few health problems, turned out to be inapplicable to those arriving in Canada: part of the strategy of this initiative was to resettle some of the most vulnerable demographics, and therefore those who arrived did not fit the profile provided.

Challenges of the Syrian resettlement process

The challenges that emerged in Saskatoon during this process had three main sources. The first, over-arching cause was the sheer *pressure* on the system brought on by the scale of the initiative. The number and demographics of the refugees, resettled within a very short timeframe, created a large amount of work for those in the settlement sector. This pressure exacerbated the other two sources.

The second source of challenges was the *resources* available to complete the task. Though additional funds were made available by the federal government for this initiative, resources are already scarce in the non-profit sector, and issues in the system that led to funding being stalled created challenges for SPOs.

Thirdly, *co-ordination* under these circumstances was difficult in a number of ways. Co-ordinating information between the various stakeholders (levels of government, SPOs, individual employees, and the public) presented challenges, as did co-ordination of the refugees themselves and their needs.

Pressure

Syrian refugees began arriving in Saskatoon December 19, 2015. By early March, 2016, 399 GARs had arrived in the city (GGP, 2016) which, on average, receives around 200 refugees per year (CIC, 2015). Their arrivals were staggered: an average of 35 individuals arrived per week during that timeframe, starting with 14 the week before Christmas, and peaking February 6-12,

when 88 Syrian GARs arrived at John Diefenbaker airport (GGP, 2016). The arrival of this number of refugees within such a short amount of time placed a considerable amount of pressure on SPOs, whose employees were tasked with picking up refugees at the airport, placing them in temporary accommodation, finding permanent housing, and providing the other services included in the RAP program.

The pressure on the system came not only from the number of refugees and the truncated timeframe, but from demographics of the refugees themselves, and a lack of information about who they were prior to their arrival. As mentioned, no accurate profile of the refugees was available in advance, and SPOs did not know who was coming until they arrived at the airport. Canada had asked to resettle the most vulnerable refugees, and it got what it asked for: the people who arrived frequently had large families, low levels of education and English skills, and high levels of health problems. Because these facts were unknown prior to their arrival, SPOs were not able to prepare to meet their specific needs in advance.

Participants described this time as overwhelming, chaotic, and exhausting. Settlement counsellors worked at all hours, especially those who spoke Arabic: one employee spent over eight hours accompanying clients to the hospital and pharmacy on Boxing Day; another's spouse joked that she was spending so much time at the airport that she should take a pillow. Many reported a loss of sleep during this time. Said one participant: "I would say [workers] were actually in zombie-mode. You know, right, and it's like 'beeeeeep', and they would just do it... January, February, March, all of them, all of us, were just go, go, go, go, go" (P-04: July 8, 2016).

The result of this process, at first, was a feeling of chaos, not only for the employees of SPOs, but for the federal, provincial, and municipal governments as well. Though they had

prepared as much as possible ahead of time — by hiring staff, recruiting volunteers, implementing emergency protocols — it was only when the refugees arrived that the challenges became apparent, and the process of finding solutions could begin. Workers were, as one participant put it, “learning along the way” (P-01: June 7, 2016).

Participants were uniformly supportive of the Syrian refugee initiative. While they believed that bringing more refugees to Canada is a good thing, for which their sector is well-prepared and capable of carrying out, many also mentioned that the scale of this particular initiative was a challenge in itself. No participant indicated that they thought fewer people should have been resettled, but several noted that bringing them in over a longer time period would have made the process easier to handle. The doubling of the annual number of refugees in a three-month period was seen by some as a political decision aimed at meeting an election promise rather than undertaken with the well-being of the sector or the refugees in mind.

Refugees’ challenges

Refugees are among the most vulnerable people in society. They often arrive with low or non-existent language skills, no familiarity with the systems or bureaucracy that exist in their new country, and few resources (CCR, 1998). Frequently they are reliant on their settlement counsellors to guide them through the process of securing housing and household goods, setting up bank accounts and submitting forms to secure funding, and provide them with orientation and language classes. Because of the specific challenges of the Syrian population (low English levels, health problems, large families, etc.), nearly all of those who arrived were considered ‘high needs’ clients who required a high level of support.

In addition to meeting the needs of this population, SPO staff had to deal with tensions that arose within the refugee population during this process. This also contributed to the pressure

they felt. Participants noted that the Syrians' expectations of life in Canada were often not aligned with the reality on the ground. The stress of the resettlement process caused frustration among recent arrivals, and at one SPO, staff had to occasionally deal with angry outbursts from refugees trying to navigate the system. As a result, the organization installed a code-based lock on the door that leads to employee offices, so that clients could not go into their offices unauthorized.

This process also caused tension among refugees from countries other than Syria who saw the benefits and attention Syrians received that they did not. Part of the government's Syrian resettlement initiative included forgiving the travel loans that other refugees still have to pay back. Having to explain this discrepancy to clients was difficult for settlement workers, who believe in providing equal services. Said one participant:

Some of our [non-Syrian] clients would actually tell us, 'Oh yeah we understand, because [the Syrians] are white refugees and we are black refugees'. Now, it created that division we're in now, race, colour, is now being put into place. And it's nothing to do with that, but if you open a rule or I would say a precedent wherein I'm willing to forgive this, but not that, it is tough on us. Especially because we are the front line. (P-04: July 8, 2016)

The perspective that the Syrian refugee initiative was a high-pressure, initially-chaotic, but ultimately rewarding and important process was uniformly shared among participants of this study.

Resources

Street-level bureaucracies consistently exist in an environment of scarce resources (Lipsky, 1980). Non-profit organizations can always benefit from more funding, and while the government increased the amount of money and resources available to SPOs during the Syrian resettlement process, there were areas in which more funds would have made the process easier. This reality is partly by design within the system of NPM, where contracts are purposefully

underfunded with the notion that charitable donations and support from the community will fill the gaps in government resources (Evans, Richmond & Shields, 2005).

IRCC provided additional funding for this process; however, participants felt there were ways in which it was inadequate to meet their needs, or that the timing of the funding made the process more difficult for them to carry out. The resource concerns fell into two categories: funding for staff, and funding for clients.

Staff Resource Issues

Insufficient

IRCC provided SPOs with funding to hire additional RAP staff early in the Syrian resettlement process. The main RAP contract-holder organization was able to hire four additional settlement counsellors, in addition to the five they already employed. Though this was welcomed by the participants, they saw the timing of the hiring as problematic: refugees started arriving in late December, but additional staff started working in early January. This meant new staff members started immediately into a high-pressure situation with little chance for training. SPOs also learned that funding for these extra staff members would not continue into the next fiscal year, and their contracts ended March 31, 2016.

Other departments and organizations outside of the RAP program who were nonetheless affected by the initiative did not receive additional funding for staff or other resources. This included community connections programs, tasked with volunteer and donation coordination, and those who coordinate language assessment and capacity.

Interpretation

Many participants listed the language barrier as one of the biggest challenges during this process, and one of the most frequently-mentioned resources lacking during this process was

interpretation. Though organizations had a few Arabic-speaking staff members, and recruited some volunteer interpreters, it was difficult to meet the demand. This also caused some tension when refugees realized that some of them had Arabic-speaking RAP counsellors to whom they could speak at any time, and others needed to wait until their counsellor arranged for interpretation before they could address their issues.

The main RAP organization hired interpreters part-time to have at their office, but said it was not enough. Another had its intake forms translated into Arabic, but found that many of the new arrivals were not able to read. Arabic-speakers on staff were in high-demand for health issues and doctor's appointments, which added to the already long hours they were working. At least one Arabic-speaking staff member was on-call to accompany refugees to the hospital, at times in the middle of the night.

Client resource issues

Insufficient

Participants mentioned the low levels of funding given to refugees by IRCC to cover their living expenses: this was also noted by the ministry itself in previous assessments of the RAP program. As mentioned in the 2011 evaluation of RAP, income support levels were insufficient to support the needs of GARs (CIC, 2011); a 2016 evaluation of all resettlement programs reiterated that RAP income support levels remained inadequate (2016). One participant noted that, without income supplements like the Child Tax Benefit, refugees have difficulty paying for food and other necessities; though most of the Syrians had children and were helped by this benefit, those without children struggled.

Participants also said the services provided through IFHP fall short of what refugees need. The funding for healthcare covers the cost of transportation and interpretation only for the

first medical appointment: this became a challenge when the population turned out to have many health issues that needed recurring treatments.

Late

Due to the complexity and short timeframe of this process, some Syrian refugees did not receive their initial start-up funding from the government on time. The federal government and the community settlement organizations point the finger at each other for this breakdown in the flow of funding: while SPOs place the blame on government for a breakdown in the flow of funds in some cases, the government says the problem was exacerbated by SPOs failing to submit the correct paperwork with the information needed to correct the problem in a timely manner.

Regardless of the reason for this complication, the result was increased hardship for SPOs trying to get refugees into permanent housing: without their start-up cheques, refugees could not pay for household goods or their first month's rent, and this caused stress amongst both workers and refugees and slowed the resettlement process.

While the Child Tax Benefit helped meet the needs of families, in some cases the payment was delayed. Participants attributed this to the lack of time available to train new staff at the beginning of the resettlement process: while trained staff knew to immediately submit a form applying for the Child Tax Benefit on behalf of their clients, some new staff members were not aware of the form. This resulted in some refugees not receiving this payment until the omission was discovered months later. Correcting mistakes like this also added to the workload for staff later in the process.

Coordination

Communication/information

The chaotic start to the Syrian refugee resettlement process included and was exacerbated by a lack of information and clear channels for communication. At the beginning, SPOs were hungry for information about the refugees destined for Saskatoon so they could properly prepare themselves; from an IRCC perspective, however, this simply was not possible. That the demographic specifics of the Syrian arrivals was not known was a large source of stress for settlement workers.

The amount of information and communication needed during this process, while important, added more pressure to workers. IRCC instated the use of spreadsheets to track arrivals, numbers of people in hotels or moved to permanent housing, which needed to be completed and sent to the federal department at the end of each day. The speed of the initiative meant that those in the sector often received information from the media or the public rather than official sources. Said one participant: “Sometimes [a member of the public] would come into an information session and they would have heard something on the drive over we didn’t know, and we’d say ‘Oh really, that’s what was decided?’” (P-05: July 12, 2016).

Communication with levels of government, other organizations, and the public was an onerous task. Participants both in and outside the sector said the number of community-level committees and meetings arranged to plan for the resettlement was — in hindsight — unnecessary. Though it was agreed that initial meetings were important to inform community partners of the process and find ways to work together, they became overly time-consuming for settlement workers who were needed elsewhere. Participants felt the number of meetings had

more to do with the fact that those outside the sector were not well-versed in the functioning of the system in place or its capacity to handle the task. According to one out-of-sector participant:

So many meetings, right? Like, so many calls, and meetings, and oh my god I just felt so bad for [the settlement workers] because I thought you know what, they just need to get on with it... they know what they have to do, just let them do it! Stop calling meetings! (P-09: September 12, 2016)

Handling inquiries from the public was also a large undertaking. While participants from the sector noted that the large response from the community was both needed and appreciated, the volume of offers of donations and volunteers was overwhelming for organizations unused to dealing with that level of support. Answering phone calls and responding to emails from the public became a large job for some members of staff.

As the process went on, communication and coordination gaps were revealed in other ways. Under the fast pace of the resettlement process, SPOs struggled to communicate with each other about their plans for the refugee clients. Because two different organizations delivered different parts of the RAP program, participants reported a number of mix-ups due to a breakdown of communication. At times staff from one organization would arrive to deliver programming to refugees whom the other organization had placed into permanent accommodation, or had arranged another activity at the same time. This was true between departments within an organization as well, or between staff and volunteers. These difficulties were illuminated by a few participants:

We would plan an activity, and we would send volunteers over to the hotel, and there wouldn't be anybody there, because they had just taken them and settled them. Because when you have to go, you have to go. (P-05: July 12, 2016)

I would have loved to have a little bit more conversation with [community organizations] prior to, because it would have alleviated the time when, because they were so happy to bring [the refugees] to go places, and not telling us in timely manner, and my programmers went to the hotel, and nobody was there! (laughing) (P-03: July 8, 2016)

Due to the complexity of the existing system and the number of actors involved, the pressure of the Syrian resettlement process illuminated communication issues which were not apparent under normal circumstances.

Programs and Services

Donations/Volunteers

In addition to communicating with the public, street-level bureaucrats at Saskatoon's SPOs had to physically coordinate both the volunteers who stepped forward to help, and the donations that they offered. This show of support from the community was welcomed enthusiastically by the settlement sector, and several participants said that they could not have successfully resettled the Syrians that arrived without it. In December, one SPO held two volunteer information sessions per week, with around 30 people per session, in order to deal with the waiting list of around 500 people wanting to volunteer.

The volume of community response meant pressure on the division charged with organizing volunteers, which did not receive funding to hire extra staff. Their staff coordinated the four venues that were offered to act as distribution points for donations: one SPO put out a call to the public for donations of clothing and household goods, and after two weeks had to ask people to stop donating because the spaces were overflowing. A local mosque filled several rooms with piles of clothing, kitchen goods, and children's books and toys; a local warehouse was similarly full. After the initial arrival of refugees, the organization opened up the centres for anyone in the community who was in need of goods, as there was far more than could be used by the Syrian arrivals.

Coordinating volunteers was similarly overwhelming. The main RAP SPO created new volunteer positions to assist during the Syrian initiative: volunteers now helped oversee the

donation centres, accompanied settlement counsellors to the airport, and assisted with basic settlement activities such as shopping for food and furniture and physically moving into and setting up refugee houses. Every volunteer had to attend an orientation session and provide a criminal record check before starting. The scheduling of volunteers was a large source of pressure for street-level bureaucrats.

Healthcare

Helping Syrian refugees to access health care presented challenges as well. Before they arrived, settlement organizations did not know the extent of health issues the population would have. As previously mentioned, this created a need for translation services and pressure on employees who spoke Arabic. Because IFHP only covers transportation and interpretation for one appointment, a gap existed for anyone who required further appointments and treatment. One participant, who was charged with helping Syrians navigate the health care system, spoke about the pressure this caused:

I was put as the medical person, medical emergency person, so any time somebody's sick, kids, adults, they would call me and I would have to go to the hospital, regardless of the time. And it was difficult because we had to explain what emergency means. Right? And it's a very difficult situation because how do you explain a situation that it's urgent or not? You can say a headache is not an emergency, but it can be, right? I'm not a physician, right, so it was very tricky. (P-07: July 22, 2016)

In this was the pressure added by the scale of health issues of new arrivals not only added stress on the time of street-level bureaucrats, but psychological stress as well.

Policy Learning

As members of the settlement sector encountered the challenges of the Syrian resettlement initiative, they simultaneously found ways to solve the problems that arose, fill the gaps that were revealed, and to work with other actors. By the end of the process, when the majority of the

Syrian refugees had been resettled and the jobs of street-level bureaucrats at SPOs were settling back into their regular pace and routine, participants expressed a belief that the lessons learned during the process had strengthened the system as a whole. One participant described it as follows: “There’s been such a fuse, you know, such a collaboration, and some of this we can attribute to the Syrian initiative. Not like they weren’t there before, but they’ve been strengthened, given this process” (P-13: November 15, 2016).

The ways this strengthening process was made possible can be grouped into two categories: 1) community response to the need for resources, and 2) solutions devised by sector actors in the course of doing their jobs. These categories overlapped, as street-level bureaucrats learned how to manage and coordinate the community support offered while they also worked to adjust their own methods and processes.

Community-filled resource gaps

Where formal resources were lacking from the federal funders, the community of Saskatoon stepped up to fill gaps in the system during the resettlement, which resulted not only in added capacity for SPOs, but education about the resettlement process among members of the public. A number of participants stressed that without the support of volunteers and donations of goods and services, the process would have been much more difficult (or impossible).

Volunteers and community support

Though coordinating volunteers was a challenge for SPOs, it was a welcome and invaluable one. Without the community members who stepped forward to help, participants said the initial resettlement process would have been too much of a stress for their paid staff. Said one:

Just imagine 10, 11 families in the airport, and we only have four counsellors. Without the volunteer, this is another thing too that is absolutely just wonderful, the community volunteers that we have here is just amazing, amazing. Bless their hearts, because they

were – night, midnight, when the families arrive, they would show up! (P-03: July 8, 2016)

Additionally, volunteers signed up to lead conversation circles with newcomers, to watch children while their parents were in language assessment sessions, to oversee the distribution of goods at donation centres. Individuals and corporations also gave monetary donations that helped SPOs to provide hampers with food and other necessities, and to cover some transportation costs not covered by government funding.

An important part of community support was the welcome Syrian refugees were given when they arrived. Indigenous residents of Saskatoon hosted a welcome ceremony at Waneskewin for the new arrivals, as did several religious organizations in the community. A local restaurant provided a meal for 100 new Syrians, some churches collaborated to host a Christmas dinner, other local groups held ‘Hello Neighbour’ events to provide activities with coffee and food. When SPOs needed venues to hold group orientation sessions, community centres offered their halls for free, along with snacks and donations; for children cooped up in hotels, a nearby school provided its gym and some volunteers to watch them while they played.

The hotels at which refugees were initially accommodated provided buffet halal meals for the Syrians, their kitchens learning to make meals that would be familiar to the newcomers. They provided space for SPOs to hold conversation circles, where local volunteers would meet with Syrian arrivals to practice their English skills. When SPOs had goods to distribute to the newcomers the hotels helped to gather and give them to people staying in their rooms.

Healthcare

Because the population that arrived frequently required access to healthcare, arranging for appointments and other related needs was a big task for the resettlement sector. Under the IFHP program, participants said translation and transportation is provided for the first appointment, but

not subsequent visits. This added additional elements of hardship for both SPO staff and patients when navigating the healthcare system.

A solution to these issues had been suggested back in 2015: five agencies — two SPOs, the health region, the Community Clinic and the university's College of Medicine — had partnered to propose a health clinic specifically for refugees to the provincial government, based on similar models in Regina and Moose Jaw (Garcea, 2016). Prior to the Syrian refugee initiative, the government had not yet responded to the proposal; the partner organizations nonetheless started the clinic and began working to address the refugees' health care needs until the federal government could come forward with funds needed to compensate those involved (Garcea, 2016). Between January 9 and March 19, the refugee clinics hosted by the Saskatoon Community Clinic were Syrians' first point of contact with the health system, where they received their immunizations and initial health screenings, and referrals to family physicians for ongoing care (Garcea, 2016). As a result of this process, the group has submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Health for a pilot project that would introduce an on-going refugee clinic at the Saskatoon Community Clinic, based on lessons learned during the Syrian refugee resettlement.

Other clinics and individual physicians also stepped forward to offer support: one doctor, mentioned by several participants, took around 100 new clients. In addition to health issues, many refugees were also in need of dental care, as IFHP covers only emergency dental. One local dentist provided 10 days of free dental work for Syrian arrivals; the university's College of Dentistry offered to take new clients at a discounted rate. A local optometrist, too, offered her services for the amount covered by IFHP so that the refugees would pay no additional cost. Clinics also offered to cover the costs of refugees' transportation to their appointments, which had been a large barrier, especially for large families in the winter.

Housing

While other cities across the country struggled to find housing for their incoming refugee population, Saskatoon had a high apartment vacancy rate in 2016 (McPherson, 2016). On average, refugees spent 16 days in hotels, compared to much longer stays in places like Toronto and Vancouver. Large families were harder to place in housing, with families of nine members in temporary accommodation for an average of 21 days.

Local property managers came forward to offer apartments: one company offered to give some new Syrian families apartments rent-free for the first six months in Canada. SPO counsellors did not accept this offer, stating it would be unfair to other refugees who did not receive a similar deal; but the management company then decided to set their rental rate to match what the refugees were given from IRCC for rent.

Sector solutions

In order to deal with the incoming Syrian population, the resettlement process needed to be adapted. Street-level bureaucrats from local SPOs had to assess the situation and quickly come up with tweaks and hacks that would accommodate the uniqueness of the situation.

As mentioned, NARS counsellors took on RAP tasks to help with the initial resettlement of Syrians as they arrived; participants felt this was a helpful adjustment to the process. Because large groups were arriving at once, counsellors did initial orientations in groups rather than individuals or families; this was aided by the fact that all of the arrivals spoke the same language. Doing group sessions aided in the organization of other partners who needed to present information, including banks, schools, SPOs, and other institutions. While the Syrians were still in hotels SPOs arranged volunteers to conduct ‘conversation circles’ with anyone who wanted to

practice their English skills. These became an initial introduction to Canadian life for new arrivals, both adults and children, and helped to mitigate the fact that English classes were not immediately available for everyone who needed a spot. One SPO rented a conference room at a hotel where refugees were staying and staffed it with people who could answer questions or deal with issues that arose (like trips to the hospital); these proved to be useful in building initial relationships between the refugees and the SPOs and helped in the problem-solving process.

During this process, SPOs had to work together in ways that had been unnecessary under normal conditions. The SPO that coordinates language assessments needed clients to fill out registration documents to receive services, and found that this process took an excessively long time: most clients could not read English, did not know the English spelling of their names, and did not understand the importance of bringing their Permanent Resident cards to their appointments. After struggling for the first two weeks, the SPO asked the main RAP holder organization to fill out clients' registration forms as part of the initial resettlement and drop off copies before they arrived for their language assessments. Each organization appointed one person in charge of contacting the other to ensure information was not lost. According to one participant: "It was just a lot of back and forth but ... eventually we got it sorted out, but it was, yeah, some growing pains in the beginning just trying to figure it out" (P-10: September 29, 2016).

Across the sector, too, organizations and levels of government found they needed to improve the way information and data was collected and communicated. In conjunction with IRCC, the umbrella organization created a "dashboard" to display information about how many people had arrived in the province, their demographics, how many were in temporary or permanent accommodation, etc. This was a sector-wide collaboration: individual SPOs would

submit relevant data about their clients to the umbrella organization, who would compile it and make it available to both the SPOs and the federal government. This initiative helped the sector to gain a picture of the resettlement as a whole, so that the response could be based on accurate data.

Prior to the Syrian resettlement initiative each SPO used its own Needs Assessment process, which made sector-wide data collection difficult. To deal with this, a standardized needs assessment form was developed to facilitate the creation of the dashboard. One participant explained:

We wanna have uniformity in our reporting, right, as a province, and to do that we can't have SPO 'A' reporting this way and SPO B reporting that way, it's going to be difficult to pull the aggregate together... it's not going to quite foster that stronger voice, because you're seeing yours and I'm seeing mine. But if we have one voice that is kind of like if we have a regression analysis we can trace that back to the time we came together to agree, and then we can continue to build on that. (P-13: November 15, 2016)

The third tool developed during this time period was a provincial map of services in the sector. Saskatchewan has four reception centres (Saskatoon, Regina, Moose Jaw and Prince Albert), but other communities also provide services to newcomers in their areas. The goal of the service map is to give an up-to-date overview of all newcomer services available across the province, which will be a useful tool not only for service providers, but members of the public as well. In describing the usefulness of this new tool, one participant said:

If one agency is full to the brim, but if they know just looking at the chart, like "oh there's one agency just down the road, okay, how about you go there" right? So that's the whole idea. Just to paint a provincial picture of where services are and also to enable clients that they have access to getting the programs. (P-13: November 15, 2016)

Within organizations, data collection and coordination also had to be improved. One SPO, whose counsellors needed to visit the homes of new refugees to deliver services, divided the city into quadrants and assigned counsellors to whatever clients were based on the

geographic quadrant they were given. This had not been done before, but made counsellors' jobs more efficient and reduced their travel time. This SPO also set aside a time each week to close the office and have a meeting where they checked in with all of the staff to ensure their plans remained cohesive.

In May 2016 the umbrella organization held a "Lessons Learned" conference in Saskatchewan, attended by representatives of each SPO and level of government. During the presentations, panel discussions, and planning sessions, these policy actors shared their experiences of the process, including what went well and where they faced the biggest challenges. The findings from the two-day event were compiled into a document entitled "Lessons Learned from the Syrian Refugee Project: Engaging the Saskatchewan Settlement System for Better Outcomes for all Newcomers". The event, held after the intensity of the initial process had passed, was a chance for the sector to reflect on their strategies, and make decisions together as a sector about which changes should be institutionalized to make the system stronger overall.

During the data collection process, one participant expressed a desire to see the capacity and organization of the sector maintained going forward:

I would encourage people to follow the lessons we've learned, and I mean we did a lot of sharing of that information with different agencies, and the hope is that we can learn from each other if this does happen again. What we did well worked really well, and so build upon that, and our ability to remain very flexible has helped us a lot. ...the next time I would hope that some of those processes would be a little better. By the end though we had streamlined that. And so the first weeks compared to the last weeks you could really see a growth. So I think if it happened again we could hopefully start from where we were at the end of that process. (P-06: July 14, 2016)

After completing such a large task and learning lessons from its undertaking, street-level bureaucrats recognized the value of maintaining the newly strengthened system.

Capacity Built into the system as a result of Syrian resettlement

Some adaptations made during this process were temporary, as they were only needed to deal with the unique situation of a high number of refugees arriving at once; these can, however, be drawn upon if an initiative like this were to happen again in the future. Other changes made during this time will be institutionalised and kept going forward.

Among the temporary adaptations were the group orientations, new settlement volunteer positions, and appointing point-people to communicate with each other across SPOs.

The changes that have occurred and that will continue to strengthen the resettlement system are detailed below. Much of the policy-learning that occurred during this process was in the form of communication and data collection and sharing. The system is now stronger because of the strategies used to track incoming refugees, and share information across organizations and sectors.

Community education

According to participants, the result of this process was increased awareness among community members and government agencies about the existence of refugees in the city, the process of resettling them, and the resources they need. Between the two RAP SPOs over 200 of the volunteers recruited were maintained some of whom were not previously aware that Saskatoon resettled any refugees at all. The provincial and municipal governments also have greater awareness of the resettlement system, which falls under federal purview. The Saskcares website, developed through the provincial umbrella organization in partnership with other local agencies and funding from the City, has continued to add resources for public education and engagement. This includes educational resources, personal stories of refugees who now live in Saskatchewan,

links to SPOs across the province, and ways for the public to volunteer in and support the settlement sector.

Healthcare

In February 2017 a permanent refugee clinic opened in the Saskatoon Community Clinic. Known as the Refugee Engagement And Community Health clinic (REACH), it initially offered refugee-specific hours every Wednesday morning, with four local doctors participating (“New One-Stop Clinic”, 2017). The pilot project is based on the clinic that was created to deal with the Syrian refugee influx, and “builds on the many lessons learned from that experience” (Garcea, 2017: 1). The clinic was created through a partnership through the two local RAP SPOs, the health region, and the University of Saskatchewan (“New One-Stop Clinic”, 2017).

Co-ordination and collaboration across the refugee resettlement system

The data dashboard created for the Syrian refugee initiative will remain in place, and be used to track refugees from all countries coming into the province. Participants said that it has been a valuable tool not just for tracking accurately the movement of refugees through the resettlement system, but of increasing awareness among those in the sector of how refugees and services are distributed across the province. The provincial umbrella organization will continue to collect data from Saskatchewan SPOs and compile it into the dashboard infographics, to give a provincial overview of the resettlement system. The standardized needs assessment form will remain in place to help facilitate data collection. The umbrella organization will also continue to compile and use the service map to track service provision across all communities in Saskatchewan. These tools, now institutionalized into refugee resettlement in Saskatchewan, provide a comprehensive view of system, and help SPOs to identify gaps in services, and avenues for co-ordination and collaboration. In addition to the tools that are now a permanent resource, the

organization's project coordinator position created during this process will also remain in place.

At the May 'lessons learned' meeting, actors also agreed that the monthly sector-wide conference calls instituted during the Syrian resettlement process should be maintained throughout the summer months; they would be retained following this time period, but cut back to quarterly, rather than monthly, calls. Participants of the conference agreed that the calls "foster inter-agency relations", and provide both clarity to the process and voices to the individual SPOs.

The local settlement sector's shared waitlists for language classes will also be maintained. Where previously each English class provider kept its own waitlist, now the central language assessment SPO can monitor where openings exist and can refer newcomers to classes that suit their needs, getting them into English training faster than before the Syrian initiative. Language training capacity has also been boosted in the city, with additional seats that Saskatoon did not have before.

Discussion

As the Syrian resettlement process advanced, street-level bureaucrats at local SPOs assessed the situation, made adjustments, and learned how the system in which they worked could be improved along the way. Lipsky says that, to deal with indeterminacy, street-level bureaucrats employ strategies including maximizing the utilization of their resources, and organizing work to derive solutions to resource constraints. Street-level bureaucrats during the Syrian resettlement initiative used the discretion Lipsky says is inherent in their jobs to adjust their work to accommodate the unique circumstances (1980). The routines and simplifications made at this level of the policy environment are, in Lipsky's view, how street-level bureaucrats "make" policy (1980). In this way, workers at SPOs molded the policy environment in which they do

their jobs through the tweaks, accommodations, and additions listed above.

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, some barriers are inherent to this system of program delivery. Lipsky points out that street-level bureaucrats work in chronically under-funded environments, and under Canada's NPM-influenced settlement system, this held true. Volunteers did step in to fill gaps in the system left by funders, as outlined by Richmond & Shields (2004). The administrative burden was also apparent, but was in most cases necessary during this rapidly-unfolding process. Tracking arrivals, accommodations, and knowing where clients were in the resettlement process was indispensable, though it added to street-level bureaucrats' workloads. Reporting the use of funds, however, was not mentioned by participants as a barrier. Though advocacy chill was a main feature of the literature on this sector, it was not a theme that emerged in the data for this study. If the research extended its timeframe past the initial, hectic state of the resettlement process, it may have become more apparent.

During this process, street-level bureaucrats became both implementers and evaluators, due to the extreme pressure of the situation. As problems with the existing system presented themselves, SPO staff evaluated the issue and implemented solutions to improve the system and make it work in real time. As Browne and Wildavsky assert, through the learning process implementers and evaluators "engage in complimentary relationships" (1984: 204) — through the process of intense pressure studied here, the implementer/evaluator roles in fact fused into one.

Actors in this process reached for whatever resources were at hand to successfully compete this process, in line with Lipsky's portrayal of their work. They quickly assembled game-plans, partnerships, and new tools to carry out their jobs. Where gaps were found, strategies were quickly formed to fill them. This process, though conducted at the ground level

and within a compressed timeframe, greatly resembles Heclo's description of policy learning as:

a maze where the outlet is shifting and the walls are being constantly re-patterned; where the subject is not one individual but a group bound together; where this group disagrees not only on how to get out but on whether getting out constitutes a satisfactory solution; where, finally there is not one but a large number of such groups which keep getting in each other's way. (1974: 308)

This aptly describes the process through which street-level bureaucrats coped with and adapted to the intensity of the resettlement process. Though Heclo's theory articulates change to policy on a large, societal scale, the three features that he identifies as shaping policy — individual agents of change, organizational inter-relationships, and the impact of previous policy itself — are the same ones that shaped this on-the-ground policy evolution.

The changes made to the resettlement system in Saskatoon were small, and the subsequent learning that occurred as a result did not drastically shift the way refugee services are delivered. There was no overhaul of the process nor brand new ideas introduced about how best to complete the task: the process was, as articulated by Lindblom and Heclo, incremental. Street-level bureaucrats made marginal adjustments based on the system that already existed in order to smooth the process during a challenging time; what occurred as a result was a system made incrementally stronger, with workers who developed tools and strengthened relationships to help them cope with their everyday tasks and potential future crises.

Conclusion

The Syrian refugee resettlement initiative of 2016 strained the settlement system as never before. For street-level bureaucrats who worked to deliver services to vulnerable refugees as they arrived in Saskatoon, the process was overwhelming and stressful, but ultimately rewarding. Working to complete their immense task within the resource constraints inherent in their jobs forced workers to collaborate, problem-solve, and create new tools to ensure the project was successful. Prior evaluations of the RAP indicated that SPO resources and staff were already at maximum capacity under normal circumstances (CIC, 2011). The resulting intensity of this process was a catalyst for a real-time evaluation of the system that existed, and finding ways to improve it. This resulted in policy learning on behalf of street-level bureaucrats and an ultimate strengthening of the local settlement sector.

Revisiting the Research Questions

The research questions asked at the beginning of this study addressed practical issues surrounding the resettlement of Syrian refugees during this initiative: what challenges did street-level bureaucrats face, how did they cope, and what lessons did they learn? From these practical questions, however, a larger narrative emerged about what happens when a system undergoes intense pressure.

The data collected for this thesis revealed that the biggest challenges faced by workers in the sector related to the pressure created by the initiative, which led to resource and coordination issues. The sharp increase the number of refugees arriving within a short timespan resulted in stress, exhaustion, and feelings of being overwhelmed, in the words of participants. The pressure quickly exposed weaknesses in the existing system (such as lack of communication mechanisms between organizations) or and created new ones that did not exist under normal circumstances

(such as delays in payments from the federal government, or numerous new staff members who have not received proper training).

From the chaos of the initiative's beginning, however, emerged community support and coordination strategies that street-level bureaucrats used to cope with the unique pressure of the situation. The questions of 'how did they cope?' and 'what lessons did they learn?' became fused as workers learned lessons as they struggled to identify methods of dealing with challenges as they presented themselves. Because there was little they could do to prepare due to lack of information and minimal time, they came up with solutions on-the-go, learning along the way which strategies worked best, and keeping them where appropriate once the initiative was complete. These strategies and lessons included incorporating the help of the community, coordinating with their counterparts across the sector, and creating new tools for data collection and sharing.

The larger story to emerge from these three questions, therefore, is one where policy learning at the ground level by street-level bureaucrats created a stronger system than the one that existed before the initiative started. The process was a difficult one, and not every issue was permanently addressed, but incremental changes were made to the system that remain in place and will continue to make refugee resettlement a smoother process in the future.

Contribution to the Literature

This case study, though specific to the context of Saskatoon, contributes an insight into the potential challenges of refugee resettlement under strain. The settlement sector in each community that went through this process likely had to develop ways to deal with the unique challenges of its environment; however the insights gleaned here suggest that there may also be

elements of their systems that improved as a result of the pressure of this time period. This study contributes a new way of looking at policy learning. Though Heclo's framework focuses on policy learning at the level of government bureaucracies, this thesis combines his theory with that of street-level bureaucrats, and argues a similar process of learning occurs among those who create policy on the ground.

Limitations and Agenda for Future Research

This thesis presents a snapshot of only a small part of this large community effort. For reasons of time and space constraints, it looks only at the RAP program and workers who played a role in the initial resettlement process of the bulk of Syrian arrivals, between late 2015 and March 2016. It does not assess other programs affected by this process, such as Settlement Support Workers in Schools (SSWIS), which works with newcomer students in the public education system; it also does not capture the perspectives of those outside the settlement organizations or levels of government. Unfortunately the views of ethnic and religious organizations (such as the Islamic Association) those who work with privately sponsored refugees, and other partners and volunteers in the community are not represented here. It was clear that these actors were vital to the overall resettlement effort, and their absence is not a reflection of their importance to certain aspects of this initiative.

This case study also focuses only on one community and its specific context; its findings are not replicable to other scenarios. The unique landscape of policy, community involvement, and mix of sector organizations all contribute to the ultimate outcome of this process and the findings presented here. However, it is possible that other communities experienced a similar, over-all process of policy learning and sector-strengthening as a result.

This present study looks specifically at the resettlement of GARs by SPOs in Saskatoon, but there were many more actors at play during this process. Future research about how PSRs and the groups who sponsored them fared during this timeframe could illuminate insights and strategies that could apply to other aspects of the system. Also, studies of programs other than RAP would provide other avenues for policy suggestions and improvements. A study of the SSWIS program during this time, for example, would give an indication of how policy could be shaped to make the process better for refugee students and their teachers. Community mobilization and participation also played a large role in this process, and research that explores the motivations of community participation in this process could provide valuable insights for similar future situations.

This study does not look at the refugees themselves or how this process affected their ability to resettle and integrate. Future studies could and should assess how refugees resettled during this unique initiative fared compared to other refugees, from a more long-term perspective.

Policy Implications

The issue of forced displacement is not going away. Global refugee numbers are at an all-time high and are not abating. Unlike some of its closest allies and counterparts, Canada's leaders continued to put forward a welcoming attitude toward refugees from abroad at the time this study concluded, and there is reason to believe that the settlement system will continue to resettle increasing numbers of refugees, if not experience a large-scale initiative similar to the post-election Syrian initiative.

What this case study of Saskatoon has shown is that the resettlement system and its workers are capable of carrying out an initiative such as this. Street-level bureaucrats at local SPOs proved themselves to be dedicated, organized, and determined enough to ensure that the project was completed successfully with the resources they had available. These workers indicated their belief in the importance of resettling refugees and doing what they can to make the process as effective as possible for the vulnerable populations whom they serve. What is also clear, however, is that they would prefer not to face the same the scale and restrictive timeframe in the future: if the government were to again resettle a large number of refugees, workers on the ground would gladly do the work, but believe the process would be better for themselves and their clients if it were spread out over a longer timeframe to mitigate the stress and pressure involved. It may also help to avoid the errors that came along with this pressure, such as the federal government's difficulty ensuring all refugees received their initial funding on time, and addition of staff to organizations without the time to properly train them.

The results presented here support previous evaluations of the RAP program and their conclusions about a need for additional resources required to make the program more effective; however, the work of street-level bureaucrats will forever be under-resourced, and therefore other strategies, such as the ones carried out here, are important to consider.

The lessons from this unique process should not be wasted. The implication here is not that systems should be put to the test for the reason of finding weaknesses in the system and improving them, but that when a situation like the Syrian refugee initiative occurs, the lessons learned should be incorporated into ongoing practice so they are not lost. Rarely does a situation occur that forces the evaluation of practices and invites cohesion of an otherwise disjointed

system like the one presented here. The tools created that will remain and strengthen data collection and information sharing will continue to make the system more effective.

The Syrian refugee initiative was an impressive undertaking for a new government and a settlement system unaccustomed to the sudden shock of drastically increased numbers in a short timeframe. The settlement sector in Saskatoon showed that, with the help of the community contributing time and resources, it could cope with pressure of a large-scale response to refugee crises, and that the lessons learned by its policy actors can result in system that been strengthened for the future.

List of Acronyms

CIC: Citizenship and Immigration Canada
GAR: Government Assisted Refugee
GGP: Global Gathering Place
IRCC: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
IRPA: Immigration and Refugee Protection Act
IWS: International Women of Saskatoon
LARC: Language Assessment and Referral Centre
NARS: Needs Assessment and Referral Service
PSR: Privately Sponsored Refugee
RAP: Resettlement Assistance Program
SODS: Saskatoon Open Door Society
SPO: Service Provider Organization
UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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Appendix

Sample interview questions: SODS employees

- 1) What did you think when you first heard about the government's plan to bring 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada?
- 2) In your experience, what parts of this process have gone well?
- 3) What have been the biggest challenges for SODS as an organization in this process? How did it deal with them?
- 4) What have been the biggest challenges for you personally? How have you dealt with them?
 - Have any existing policies been a hindrance to you doing your job during this time?
- 5) Can you think of some innovative ideas/procedures that you or others at SODS have used during this time?
- 6) What additional resources have you been given to help deal with this situation? What resources are you lacking?
- 7) What role have volunteers played during this time?
- 8) What new or existing partnerships have helped? What kind of relationship do SODS have with its partners?
- 9) What, in your experience, has been the community's reaction to the policy?
- 10) What are the biggest challenges faced by your new Syrian clients? Is SODS equipped to deal with them?
- 11) What policies or resources would have made this process easier for you? More effective for your clients?

Sample interview questions: Participants external to SODS

- 1) What did you think when you first heard about the government's plan to bring 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada?
- 2) What is your/your organization's role in the Syrian refugee resettlement process?

- 3) In your experience, what parts of this process have gone well?
- 4) How have you partnered with SODS during this process?
- 5) What do you think have been the biggest challenges/successes of this policy?
- 6) What do you think could have made this process easier?